



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



WEDNESDAY — 26 JAN 2022

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HEADLINE	01/26 Vaccination gap sets stage another variant?
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/26/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#omicrons-spread-underscores-the-potential-consequences-of-the-global-vaccine-gap-experts-say
GIST	<p>A coronavirus wave driven by the highly infectious Omicron variant wave may be cresting in parts of North America and Europe, but new cases are still climbing in less-vaccinated regions, and World Health Organization leaders warn that the global surge and the world's wide vaccine gap could set the stage for another dangerous variant.</p> <p>Maria Van Kerkhove, the agency's Covid-19 technical lead, said in a livestream hosted on Tuesday that challenges existed in every country about reaching the most vulnerable unvaccinated communities.</p> <p>"The fact remains that more than three billion people haven't received their first dose yet, so we have a long way to go," said Dr. Van Kerkhove, noting that about 21 million cases were reported to the agency last week. "There are many countries still in the middle of this Omicron wave."</p> <p>New daily cases remain at record highs globally, averaging about 3.3 million — an increase of more than 25 percent over two weeks and a staggering rise compared with a rate of about 600,000 a day in early December, according to a New York Times database that uses data from Johns Hopkins University. Cases have continued to rise in Latin America, the Middle East and Asia.</p> <p>And Omicron is still spreading in Eastern and Central Europe, where vaccination rates are lagging.</p> <p>Although vaccine shortages are easing, only about 62 percent of the world's population has received at least one shot, and a striking divide between the rich and poor regions of the world remains. In low-income countries, only 10 percent of the population has received at least one dose. In high- and upper-middle-income countries, 78 percent have received at least one dose.</p> <p>The potential consequences of the vaccine gap have been underscored by Omicron, which was first identified in southern Africa. Low vaccination coverage creates conditions for widespread virus circulation and with that the possibility of new variants emerging.</p> <p>Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the W.H.O., said on Monday that the emergency phase of the pandemic was still very much here.</p> <p>"It's dangerous to assume that Omicron will be the last variant or that we are in the endgame," Dr. Tedros said at an executive board meeting of the organization. "On the contrary, globally, the conditions are ideal for more variants to emerge."</p> <p>Dr. Hans Kluge, the director for the agency's European region, said in a statement on Monday that it was too early for nations to drop their guard, with so many people unvaccinated around the world. But, he said, with more vaccination and natural immunity through infection, "Omicron offers plausible hope for stabilization and normalization."</p> <p>During Tuesday's livestream, W.H.O. officials again emphasized that the virus would continue to circulate and that Omicron would not be the last variant. The next one would need to be even more contagious to overtake Omicron, Dr. Van Kerkhove said, adding that the "big question" was whether it would be more severe.</p> <p>The agency said that without more equitable distribution and administration of vaccines, the pandemic would be prolonged.</p> <p>Dr. Mike Ryan, the executive director of its Health Emergencies Program, said that the greatest failure with world's pandemic response has been "our inability to deliver these lifesaving tools to the people who will benefit most."</p> <p>"We can have all the technology and innovation," he said, "but if we don't have the mechanisms for how the fruit of that innovation are going to be shared, then we fail."</p>

HEADLINE	01/26 WHO: record weekly cases, deaths stable
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/who-record-weekly-covid-cases-last-week-but-deaths-stable/
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization said there were 21 million new coronavirus cases reported globally last week, the highest weekly number of COVID-19 cases recorded since the pandemic began. The number of deaths was largely unchanged, at more than 50,000.</p> <p>In its weekly assessment of the pandemic, issued late Tuesday, the U.N. health agency said the number of new coronavirus infections rose by 5% and that the rate of increase appears to be slowing; only half of regions reported an increase in COVID-19. Earlier this month, the previous highest number of cases — 9.5 million — was recorded amid a 71% spike from the week before, as the hugely contagious omicron variant swept the world.</p> <p>WHO said the biggest increase in cases was seen in the Middle East, with a 39% rise, followed by a 36% jump in Southeast Asia. Deaths increased in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and the Americas, but fell in other regions.</p> <p>On Monday, WHO’s director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus cautioned against talk that the pandemic might be entering its “endgame,” warning that conditions remain ripe for new variants to emerge, with vast swathes of unvaccinated people in some countries amid rapid virus transmission. Still, Tedros said it might be possible for the world to exit the acute phase of the pandemic, if goals like immunizing at least 70% of each country’s population are met later this year.</p> <p>In Britain, researchers at Imperial College London recorded the highest-ever prevalence rate of COVID-19 in England earlier this month, estimating that about one in every 23 people tested had the virus.</p> <p>The scientists said there were indications the massive spike caused by omicron had started to level off but that infection rates remained high. Scientists have said that omicron is far less likely to cause serious disease and hospitalization but spreads much faster than previous COVID-19 variants, including delta.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Washington ranked worst state for potholes
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/washington-worst-state-potholes/293-e89f1352-5e02-4209-86b8-787ac660f771
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — If you’ve spent any time driving around Spokane or eastern Washington, you know that potholes are something of a way of life here.</p> <p>Now, a new study finds that Washington state leads the nation when it comes to potholes.</p> <p>The study by QuoteWizard, an insurance quote site, found that Google searches for potholes have increased 72% in the past month in Washington. The study also states that Washington has more people researching potholes than any other state.</p> <p>So, Google searches may not be the most scientific way to rate the pothole problems, but it clearly shows that the issue is top of mind here in Washington.</p> <p>Spokane’s pothole tracker shows the city has filled 326 potholes as of Jan. 20. That’s about 16 potholes filled per day.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 High levels infections health care staff
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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/washington-health-care-staff-800-covid-cases-hospitals/281-84f97187-a018-492c-a9bb-037c6ea304a2
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — On average, Washington health care facilities are reporting an average of 800 to 850 new COVID-19 cases among staff per day.</p> <p>The stat was shared during the Washington State Hospital Association’s (WSHA) Tuesday briefing along with word that despite a slowdown in western Washington case rates, the omicron wave is nowhere close to being finished with the state.</p> <p>Plus, even with shortened quarantine periods for COVID positive staff, the high levels of virus among hospital workers is only stretching facilities even further.</p> <p>In the last week, hospitals have had a daily average occupancy of 2,286 COVID-19 patients, which hit a high of 2,300 at one point.</p> <p>“Last week was an extremely rough week for all those in our state who needed access to life-saving hospital care,” said WSHA Executive Vice President Taya Briley. “Hospitalizations were trending up, and staff continued to call out sick because they had either contracted COVID or they were having to isolate due to exposure.”</p> <p>The state’s sixth wave in the pandemic is being further complicated by the uneven surge with eastern Washington experiencing an uptick in cases and hospitalizations as western Washington sees rates decrease.</p> <p>In the last week, there’s been a 38% increase in COVID patients at Chelan County hospitals, a 31% increase in Yakima County, a 23% increase in Spokane County and about a 15% increase in Kitsap and Clark counties.</p> <p>“We are concerned about the rising cases and hospitalizations in eastern Washington and Idaho and how they will work all across Washington state,” Briley said. “Hospitalization numbers are trending down in parts of western Washington in the past week, but overall hospitalization numbers in western Washington remained very high.”</p> <p>Hospital leaders only expect these increases to further strain staff in hospitals to the east, more of which are more rural and smaller than facilities in western Washington.</p> <p>Chief Nursing Officer at Pullman Regional Medical Center Jeannie Eylar said, “The shortage is real, and hospitals are trying every aspect that they can to recruit and retain all of their staff, nurses, lab techs, imaging techs. It takes that whole team, and it takes a lot of creativity and a lot of effort to make it the kind of work that people want to do.”</p> <p>Additional measures by the state have been taken to relieve hospitals of some strain, including the help of 100 National Guard members in nonclinical settings.</p> <p>“Some of the National Guard teams are on the ground and helping to provide relief and emergency departments that were especially hard hit, and the state is moving the assessments required for difficult to discharge patients forward at a faster pace,” Briley said, adding that at-home tests are also relieving some pressure since fewer people are going to emergency rooms looking to get tested for the virus.</p> <p>WSHA is also calling on the state to increase funding to help future nurses get the required education in order to help alleviate the ongoing shortage.</p> <p>Briley said the state’s health facilities are currently reporting that they need about 6,000 more nurses. However, during the 2019-2020 school year, the state only produced roughly 2,600 new nurses, some of whom left the state.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Costly pothole problem Seattle-area
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/costs-from-widening-pothole-problem-in-seattle-area-mounts-for-drivers-local-governments
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Drivers often try to dodge potholes but for motorists in the Seattle area who can't and end up hitting one, it can be an expensive fix with repairs soaring into the hundreds and even thousands of dollars.</p> <p>Alonzo Edwards, who lives in Seattle, is one driver who knows firsthand just how costly the city's pothole problem can be.</p> <p>"I heard a loud bang and then a few miles later I pulled over because the car started wobbling a little bit," he said while describing the moment his tire collided with a street pothole a few months ago. "I'm looking at close to about \$1,000 easily."</p> <p>Repair costs are top of mind for drivers who have to navigate the potholes that the Seattle Department of Transportation has been playing catch-up to fill since the recent winter storm.</p> <p>A spokesperson said city crews have already covered about 1,000 so far in January, and they typically fill about 15,000 in Seattle a year.</p> <p>Drivers and local governments are grappling with problems from a growing number of potholes on area roads.</p> <p>"Yesterday, I dodged 12," said Mark Hubbard, owner of Rick's Automotive Service Center, adding that he sympathizes with drivers who end up with sky high repair costs after running over a pothole that can mean buying new tires and/or repairing alignments and damaged suspensions. One customer "has unfortunately, over the past year, been in on three separate occasions."</p> <p>Drivers who are lucky enough to dodge a repair shop bill are still footing the costs from potholes.</p> <p>According to data from the city's risk management department, Seattle has paid out since 2018 tens of thousands of dollars in damage claims from motorists who struck a pothole.</p> <p>Voters have approved hundreds of millions of dollars to cover capital construction projects that aimed to patch up potholes from 2015 to 2024. That includes work on the Greenlake Loop done last year and ongoing work on Delridge Way.</p> <p>Many drivers said they hope the work will make the streets less prone to potholes and help save their wallets.</p> <p>"On my way home from work I hit them at least twice a day," Edwards said.</p> <p>An SDOT spokesperson said filling each pothole costs about a few hundred dollars for the materials and to pay the crews, but the cost varies, depending on the size and location.</p> <p>When asked by KOMO News if it would be easier or cheaper to do large pavement preservation projects instead of constantly patching up the roads, officials said that's not a possibility because they can't do those projects everywhere at once, and it's not necessarily easier because they need the money for it and some of that work takes years.</p> <p>Drivers will have a better idea of what pavement projects are on the way once SDOT releases its updated workplan later this year.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 Free N95 masks in some stores already
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SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/01/26/covid-n95-masks-available-pharmacies-stores/8211643167433/
GIST	<p>Jan. 26 (UPI) -- Millions of Americans will be able to pick up free N95 masks at grocery stores and pharmacies nationwide beginning on Wednesday, as part of a White House effort to control the spread of the Omicron COVID-19 variant.</p> <p>President Joe Biden announced last week that his administration would make 400 million of the specialized N95 masks from the national stockpile available to Americans at no additional cost. Health officials say the masks offer better protection than cloth masks, are made of a specialized material and fit tighter around the nose and mouth.</p> <p>Biden said that Americans can have as many as three N95 masks each, and that officials expect the distribution to ramp up in early February. Some, however, some pharmacies and grocery stores involved in the federal program have already begun making them available.</p> <p>The N95 masks can be found at various grocery and pharmacy chains nationwide, including CVS, Walgreens, Walmart, Kroger, Hy-Vee and Meijer. The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention has compiled a state-by-state list of places in the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program where Americans can pick up masks now or in the near future.</p> <p>Meijer, which operates 250 grocery stores and pharmacies throughout the Midwest, said that its stores have so far received about 3 million of the specialized masks.</p> <p>"The N95 masks will be in boxes set on a table near the Meijer greeter stand of the grocery entrance," the company said in a statement this week. "The greeter, who will be wearing gloves, will place the N95 masks in piles of three for customers to take."</p> <p>Christina Gayman, a representative for Hy-Vee, told NBC's Today that the grocery chain, which operates mostly in the Midwest and South, began distributing the masks last week. She added that all Hy-Vee stores are expected to have N95 masks available by Wednesday.</p> <p>Walgreens, the pharmacy chain with about 9,000 stores across the United States, is expected to begin distributing N95 masks on Friday -- while competitor Rite Aid says they will be available in some of its locations later this week, and all stores by early next month.</p> <p>Retail giant Walmart said it expects to begin making N95 masks from the federal stockpile available late next week -- and pharmacy chain CVS said it will start receiving them soon.</p> <p>"Through our continued participation in the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program, we'll be offering access to free N95 masks at CVS Pharmacy locations in the coming weeks as we receive supply from the Federal Government," CVS said in a statement.</p> <p>"Our work to distribute high-quality masks as part of this program is an extension of our commitment to providing equitable access to the tools necessary to combat COVID-19, including testing, vaccines and authorized therapies."</p> <p>The White House has said that more than 25 million of the N95 masks will also be delivered to 1,300 community health centers and 60,000 food pantries and soup kitchens in the United States beginning in March.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 SKorea shifts Covid strategy amid surge
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/01/26/covid-omicron-coronavirus-record-cases-anseong-hospital-new-strategy/6301643194074/

SEOUL, Jan. 26 (UPI) -- South Korea recorded a single-day record for new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, with a rise of more than 13,000 infections as health officials pivot to a new strategy for dealing with a surge driven by the more infectious Omicron variant.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency reported just over 13,000 new cases, an increase over the previous record of 8,571 infections that was set Tuesday. The Omicron variant has officially become the dominant strain in South Korea, accounting for 50.3% of cases last week, the country's health ministry said on Monday.

Due to high vaccination rates and Omicron's relative mildness, however, South Korea is moving away from its highly centralized "3T" model -- test, trace and treat -- to a system that looks to preserve hospital bed capacity and limit disruptions to the economy.

"The pattern of the [Omicron] epidemic is different from the Delta epidemic and the goal of antiviral management is also different," Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum said at a COVID-19 task force meeting Wednesday. "From now on, the main goal of our antiviral response will be to reduce critical cases and deaths."

The new system was rolled out on Wednesday in four areas that have experienced high Omicron surges -- South Jeolla Province and the cities of Gwangju, Pyeongtaek and Anseong -- and local clinics are taking the lead in testing and treatment.

Kim said the approach "aims to minimize severe cases and deaths, prevent overload and collapse of the medical system and minimize socioeconomic damage." It will begin a gradual nationwide expansion on Saturday, he added.

In an effort to keep businesses and public services running, officials are shortening the isolation period for confirmed cases from 10 days to seven, provided the patient is fully vaccinated, and are no longer requiring close contacts of a confirmed case to quarantine. Other changes include a shift to rapid antigen tests, which can quickly detect large numbers of infections, while reserving more accurate but labor- and cost-intensive PCR tests for older and at-risk patients.

South Korea's health ministry has been working since November to move treatment of milder cases away from hospitals and specialized COVID-19 health facilities into the home.

"A home treatment system is crucial," Kim Seung-il, head of at-home treatment operations at the Ministry of Health and Welfare, told reporters on Tuesday. "Especially with Omicron, the high number of patients puts a strain on hospital resources."

South Korea has gone from just 34.1% of cases receiving at-home treatment in November to 68.8% as of this week, Kim said.

One public hospital in Anseong, a satellite city about 50 miles south of Seoul, has been running a pilot program since October in a model that could be replicated in other South Korea cities.

"What we have learned is that in order to fully utilize our medical resources we also need to change our mindset," Lim Seong-gwan, director of Gyeonggi Provincial Medical Center Anseong Hospital, said during a tour of the hospital's facilities for reporters. "The guidelines we have may work today but not tomorrow, so we need to keep modifying our strategy."

Under the pilot program, at-home patients are given oximeters, thermometers and self-testing kits and check in two or three times a day over the phone with nurses and doctors. Those with more serious symptoms can visit a specialized outpatient clinic for consultations through protective glass and have diagnostic tests done by fully protected hospital staff.

	<p>The project is coordinated with the city government's health center, which acts as an initial triage location, and works with local transportation networks to provide secure taxis or shuttle buses for patients without their own vehicles.</p> <p>"With this system, we can reduce duplication and work more efficiently," Lim said. "It improves safety and improves the efficiency of bed resources."</p> <p>Health officials have said they are expecting Omicron-led infections to continue surging, with cases potentially topping 30,000 per day by next month.</p> <p>More than 85% of South Korea's population is fully vaccinated and over half have received a booster shot as of Wednesday, the KDCA said.</p> <p>South Korea has also been quick to approve and import antiviral pills such as Pfizer's Paxlovid in order to treat mild and moderate cases. As of Wednesday, Seoul has secured Paxlovid pills for 762,000 patients and Merck's molnupiravir for 242,000.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 Sweden extends pandemic curbs two weeks
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-extends-pandemic-curbs-by-two-weeks-2022-01-26/
GIST	<p>STOCKHOLM, Jan 26 (Reuters) - Sweden will extend its current pandemic measures by another two weeks, the minister for health said on Wednesday, as the Omicron variant is spreading at record speed.</p> <p>The curbs mean bars and restaurants have to close at 2300 and there is a cap of 500 people inside larger indoor venues.</p> <p>"We have an extremely high level of spread," Health Minister Lena Hallengren told a news conference. "The restrictions must remain in place for two weeks. If everything goes as planned and if the situation allows, the restrictions will be lifted after that."</p> <p>Sweden has seen some 270,000 confirmed cases in the last seven days but limited testing means the health agency believes the real number could be over half a million.</p> <p>The spread has put strain on the healthcare system but much less than during previous waves. The number of patients treated in intensive care have been between 90 and 120 people for the past four weeks.</p> <p>Sweden stood out early in the pandemic by opting against lockdowns, instead relying on voluntary measures focused on social distancing and good hygiene. It has seen deaths per capita much higher than Nordic neighbours but lower than most European countries that opted for lockdowns.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 Yemen govt. forces sweep central province
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-united-arab-emirates-yemen-houthis-58a9a33c91f28b1ada77bbd69f510640
GIST	<p>CAIRO (AP) — Forces of Yemen's internationally recognized government and their United Arab Emirates-backed allies swept through a strategic central province, forcing Houthi rebels out of its second largest district, officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>The development in Marib province is another setback for the Iranian-backed Houthis, who for a year attempted to take control of the oil-rich province. Their offensive crumbled when the UAE-backed Giants Brigades helped reclaim the nearby Shabwa province earlier this month before advancing in Marib under air cover from the Saudi-led coalition.</p>

Government forces and the Giants retook the district of Harib and its center south of Marib city after nearly two weeks of fighting, pushing their way to the nearby district of Juba, said Brig. Abdou Megali, a military spokesman. The Houthis had taken the two districts last year, part of their offensive on Marib.

Fighting also raged between government forces and the Houthis elsewhere including in the provinces of Jawf and Taiz, he added.

The Giants posted footage purportedly showing their forces roaming through what they said was the center of Harib. Other footage showed fighters on armored vehicles speeding in what they said were mountainous areas overlooking the district.

Two other military officials from inside the coalition also said the district had been taken. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media.

In a decree for local authorities, Marib's provincial governor Sheikh Sultan al-Aradah ordered the restoration of all services in the district, which he said the Houthis disrupted when they took it in September.

Houthi spokesmen did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The recent escalation of ground fighting has coincided with intense Houthi cross-border attacks on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as well as heavy coalition airstrikes on the rebel-held Yemeni capital, Sanaa.

The Houthi military media reported dozens of coalition airstrikes on Sanaa and elsewhere in Yemen over the past 24 hours. The rebels said there were at least 20 airstrikes overnight on Sanaa alone.

The ongoing battlefield setbacks prompted Brig. Yahai Sarei, a Houthi military spokesman, to threaten further attacks on the UAE.

The Houthis have made Marib city their main target for the past three years. They first retook town after town in the neighboring province, before finally reaching the outskirts of the city itself. But their hopes in capturing it diminished when the UAE-backed forces joined the clashes, shifting the tide of the conflict.

The war in the Arab world's poorest country began in 2014, when the Houthis took Sanaa and much of northern Yemen, forcing the government to flee to the south, then into exile in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi-led coalition, backed at the time by the U.S., entered the war months later to try to restore the government to power.

The conflict has since become a regional proxy war that has killed tens of thousands of civilians and fighters. The war also created the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Race: retrieve F-35 crash before China can
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/25/asia/us-f-35-crash-recovery-south-china-sea-intl-hnk-ml/index.html
GIST	<p>Seoul, South Korea (CNN)The United States Navy is trying to retrieve its most advanced fighter jet from the depths of the South China Sea, an extremely complex operation that analysts say will be closely monitored by Beijing.</p> <p>The F-35C, a single-engine stealth fighter and the newest jet in the US Navy fleet, crash-landed on the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson during routine operations on Monday, the Navy said.</p> <p>The \$100 million warplane impacted the flight deck of the 100,000-ton aircraft carrier and then fell into the sea as its pilot ejected, Navy officials said. The pilot and six sailors aboard the Vinson were injured.</p>

While damage to the Vinson was only superficial, and it and the carrier's air wing have resumed normal operations, the Navy faces the daunting task of attempting to pull the F-35 off the ocean floor in some of the most contested waters on the planet.

The Navy is giving scant details on its recovery plans for the F-35C, the first of which [only became operational in 2019](#).

"The US Navy is making recovery operations arrangements for the F-35C aircraft involved in the mishap aboard USS Carl Vinson" is all a spokesman for the US 7th Fleet, Lt. Nicholas Lingo, would tell CNN on Wednesday.

Though the Navy has not revealed where in the South China Sea the crash occurred, Beijing claims almost all of the 1.3 million square mile (3.3 million square kilometer) waterway as its territory and has bolstered its claims by building up and militarizing reefs and islands there.

Chinese naval and coast guard vessels maintain a constant presence in South China Sea waters.

The [US disputes those Chinese territorial claims](#) and uses deployments like the one the Vinson was on to push its case for a "free and open Indo-Pacific."

There has been no official Chinese comment on the crash, with state media reporting it only citing "foreign media."

But China will almost certainly want to get a look at the lost F-35, analysts said.

"China will try to locate and survey it thoroughly using submarines and one of its deep diving submersibles," said Carl Schuster, a former director of operations at the US Pacific Command's Joint Intelligence Center in Hawaii.

Schuster, a former US Navy captain, said it's possible China could make a claim for the salvage rights based on its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

"Salvaging the plane with commercial and coast guard assets will enable Beijing to claim it is recovering a potential environmental hazard or foreign military equipment from its territorial waters," Schuster said.

But such an operation would present political risks, said Collin Koh, research fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

"To overtly go about doing this may risk worsening tensions with the US. I don't believe Beijing has stomach for that," he said.

"However, we can expect the Chinese to shadow, hang around and keep tabs on any such American salvage and recovery operation," Koh said.

Schuster said the US Navy will likely keep some presence in the area where the wreckage is believed to be in an operation that could take months, depending upon how deep under the South China Sea the F-35 is. US salvage vessels are 10 to 15 days transit time to the site, Schuster said, and recovery once there could take up to 120 days.

Asked whether the US could just destroy the wreckage with a torpedo or an explosive charge, analysts said that was unlikely.

"My question is whether you truly leave behind nothing of potentially consequential intelligence bonanza amongst the scattered smithereens on the seabed -- which any interested party with the capability may still retrieve after all?" Koh said.

	<p>This US Navy recovery effort will mark the third time a country flying the F-35 has tried to pull one from the depths.</p> <p>Last November, a British F-35B crashed on takeoff from the deck of its aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth into the Mediterranean Sea. Britain's Defense Ministry confirmed to news outlets in early January that it had been recovered in December amid worries the sunken aircraft could have been a target for Russian intelligence.</p> <p>And after a Japanese F-35A crashed into the Pacific in 2019, worries emerged that it could be a target for Russian and Chinese intelligence.</p> <p>But only small pieces of the Japanese aircraft were recovered by Japan as that plane is thought to have hit the water at full speed.</p> <p>In the case of the Mediterranean crash and this week's mishap, the planes were moving more slowly, so more of the wreckage is expected to be found.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 Russia threatens 'appropriate measures'
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/russia-threatens-measures-latest-statement-us-ukraine-negotiations
GIST	<p>Russia's top diplomat on Wednesday promised to take appropriate measures if the West's response to Moscow's security demands is not found to be constructive.</p> <p>The U.S. agreed with Russia that it would answer questions regarding NATO's military presence in the region. The Kremlin has accused the West of a military expansion that raises security concerns for Moscow, Reuters reported. The report said Ukraine had no objections to the U.S. responses.</p> <p>"If we do not receive a constructive answer from the west on our security demands, Moscow will take appropriate measures," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in a statement, Reuters reported.</p> <p>Russia is seeking sweeping security measures and the guarantee that Ukraine will not be allowed to join the transatlantic NATO alliance.</p> <p>The statement comes after Ukraine approved a list of actions the U.S. has promised to take to avert a military crisis.</p> <p>Ukraine Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said his country was completely behind the U.S. and President Biden regarding the negotiating effort, Reuters reported.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin has a "menu of options" for taking hostile action toward Ukraine, Fox News contributor Daniel Hoffman said to Fox News Digital on Tuesday.</p> <p>"He could blockade the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov," Hoffman said, highlighting the 100,000 Russian troops Putin has stationed at the border with Ukraine. "He could launch a full-throttle assault on Kyiv, which we would obviously see. He could also use his Spetsnaz guys, special forces guys — and they're inside Ukraine already — to topple this Zelensky government. That's also an option."</p> <p>"I have a high level of confidence Putin will do something," Hoffman added. "As far as what that is, I'm not even sure if Putin has decided yet."</p> <p>The White House has previously urged Americans to leave Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Covid surge gains in eastern Washington
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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/king-county-omicron-cases-decline-as-second-chapter-of-surge-gains-steam-in-eastern-washington/
GIST	<p>Cases of the coronavirus are on the decline in the Seattle metro area, but hospital leaders warned Tuesday that the omicron variant is gaining steam in Eastern Washington and could ravage already stressed health care facilities.</p> <p>For the first time during the pandemic, the Washington Medical Coordination Center activated its “guaranteed-acceptance rotation protocol,” which goes into effect when all hospitals are “full to the point of needing to refuse patients” and need help finding beds, Taya Briley, vice president of the Washington State Hospital Association, said in a news briefing. It was active for several days last week.</p> <p>Already some Washington hospitals have received patient transfer requests from health facilities in Idaho. In King County, data shows the rise in omicron infections peaked on Jan. 10 with 7,563 daily cases. Since then, the county has charted a significant decline in infections, dropping at least 43% in the past week.</p> <p>Hospitalizations in King County were also showing signs of slowing or even plateauing, county health officer Dr. Jeff Duchin said in a Tuesday statement.</p> <p>Still, coronavirus levels remain high with the county averaging about 3,100 daily cases and about 60 daily hospitalizations — figures far higher than those during past waves of the pandemic, he said.</p> <p>And the state isn’t yet in the clear.</p> <p>“We are bracing ourselves for the second chapter of the omicron surge as it hits Eastern Washington and Idaho,” Briley said. Omicron first surged in larger metro areas, including Seattle.</p> <p>Briley added that Washington saw an average of 2,286 COVID hospitalizations within the past week, compared to about 2,148 the prior week — about a 6% increase.</p> <p>At this point in the pandemic, Briley said the pattern is a “well-worn trend.”</p> <p>“The number of COVID cases goes up, then the number of hospitalizations goes up, number of folks on ventilators goes up, then unfortunately we see more deaths,” she said. Last week in particular, she said, was an “extremely rough week” for some hospitalized patients.</p> <p>Two patients were able to receive urgent care as a result of the guaranteed-acceptance rotation protocol, which was in effect for three days before capacity eased, she added. The protocol, unique to Washington state, was designed by hospitals last fall and is used to help the state’s sickest patients find hospital beds.</p> <p>In Eastern Washington, some hospitals are again beginning to receive requests from Idaho health care facilities looking for open beds, said Jeannie Eylar, chief nursing officer at Pullman Regional Hospital, a 25-bed critical-access facility in Eastern Washington.</p> <p>Delayed care issues have hit Pullman Regional Hospital particularly hard, Eylar said during the Tuesday news briefing, referencing one patient whose bowel cancer surgery had been continuously pushed back.</p> <p>“We’re trying to balance getting these people the surgeries they’ve been waiting for months and taking care of the emergency patients who come into the doors, and then trying to be good neighbors” to Idaho hospitals, some of which declared crisis standards of care Monday, she said.</p> <p>Health care systems use the term “crisis standards of care” to describe operations that prioritize patients for resources and deny treatment to one patient in order to give it to another. Washington state has yet to declare crisis standards of care since the pandemic began.</p> <p>The COVID patients pouring into the hospital’s intensive care unit are mostly unvaccinated, Eylar said. “Eastern Washington is experiencing just exactly what Western Washington experienced,” she said.</p>

	<p>The majority of vaccinated staff who have become infected, meanwhile, report milder cold-like symptoms, she said, but quarantine and isolation requirements have posed challenges similar to hospitals on the western side of the state.</p> <p>“This is definitely not the time to declare the CoV-19 pandemic over (again), but a time to think about how we can transition to managing CoV-19 more effectively over the long term, using the increasing [number] of effective tools we have,” Duchin tweeted last week.</p> <p>Because omicron’s evolution remains “uncertain,” Duchin said Tuesday, the public should continue getting vaccinated, boosting when eligible, limiting indoor gatherings in crowded and poorly ventilated settings, masking up and isolating and testing if symptoms develop.</p> <p>“I’m relieved that the trajectory of our (omicron) surge has turned for now and I hope the decline in cases, hospitalizations and deaths continues so that before long we can move to more sustainable, long-term strategies to limit the morbidity from this virus,” Duchin said. “But for now, the course of the pandemic remains unpredictable.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 CBP expands Simplified Arrival in South
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/cbp-expands-simplified-arrival-to-international-airports-in-the-south/
GIST	<p>U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) announced the implementation of Simplified Arrival at six airports in the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee. Rogers Municipal Carter Field Airport, Lakefront Airport, Alexandria (Louisiana) International Airport, Gulfport Biloxi International Airport, Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport, and Memphis International Airport.</p> <p>Simplified Arrival is an enhanced international arrival process that uses facial biometrics to automate the manual document checks that are already required for admission into the United States. Facial biometrics provide travelers with a touchless process that further secures and streamlines international arrivals while fulfilling a longstanding congressional mandate to biometrically record the entry and exit of non-U.S. citizens.</p> <p>“CBP is excited to partner with these airports to expand the use of facial biometrics for international arrivals,” said Steven Stavinoha, Director, Field Operations – New Orleans Field Office. “This enhanced process is secure, touchless and supports the travel recovery efforts, while protecting the privacy of travelers.”</p> <p>Simplified Arrival only uses the biometric facial comparison process at a time and place where travelers are already required by law to verify their identity by presenting a travel document. When travelers arrive at one of these six airports on an international flight, they will pause for a photo at the primary inspection point. CBP’s biometric facial comparison process will compare the new photo of the traveler to a small gallery of high-quality images that the traveler has already provided to the government, such as passport and visa photos. In addition, foreign travelers who have traveled to the U.S. previously may no longer need to provide fingerprints as their identity will be confirmed through the touchless facial comparison process.</p> <p>Simplified Arrival pairs one of the industry’s highest ranked facial comparison algorithms (as assessed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology) with trained CBP officers who are skilled at verifying the authenticity of travel documents. If a traveler cannot be matched to a photo on record using the Simplified Arrival process, the traveler will proceed through the traditional inspection process consistent with existing requirements for entry into the United States.</p>

	<p>Travelers who wish to opt out of the new biometric process may notify a CBP officer as they approach the primary inspection point. These travelers will be required to present a valid travel document for inspection by a CBP officer and they will be processed consistent with existing requirements for admission into the United States.</p> <p>CBP is committed to its privacy obligations and has taken steps to safeguard the privacy of all travelers. CBP has employed strong technical security safeguards and has limited the amount of personally identifiable information used in the facial biometric process. New photos of U.S. citizens will be deleted within 12 hours. Photos of most foreign nationals will be stored in a secure Department of Homeland Security system.</p> <p>CBP and its air travel partners are expanding the use of facial biometrics through public-private partnerships to not only fulfill the Congressional security mandate, but also to further secure and enhance touchless travel wherever identity verification is required for international travel.</p> <p>To date, more than 130 million travelers have participated in the biometric facial comparison process at air, land and seaports of entry. Since September 2018, CBP has leveraged facial biometrics to prevent nearly 2,000 imposters from illegally entering the United States by using genuine travel documents that were issued to other people.</p>
Return to Top	<i>More information about CBP's efforts to secure and streamline travel through facial biometrics is available here.</i>

HEADLINE	01/25 Audit: SPD disciplinary system falls short
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/audit-finds-seattle-police-disciplinary-system-is-falling-short-not-transparent
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - A report by the city's Inspector General finds the Seattle Police Department's disciplinary system is "falling short" and is "not transparent."</p> <p>The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) began an audit of the police department in Dec. 2020, and on Tuesday presented their findings to the City Council during a bi-monthly public safety committee meeting.</p> <p>According to the report, Seattle Police practices—with provisions from the Police Officers Guild (SPOG) and Police Management Association (SPMA)—create gaps in the disciplinary system.</p> <p>The OIG pointed to processes in how disciplinary actions are decided and recorded, and how those updates are relayed to people who filed complaints in the first place. Additionally, police chiefs have demonstrably chosen lower levels of officer punishment when presented with information from the Discipline Committee, especially when a range of discipline included termination. OIG notes that employees are entitled to a Loudermill hearing with the police chief, allowing them to give their side of the story before a disciplinary action is made, but complainants do not have an equivalent opportunity to do the same.</p> <p>Overall, the Inspector General says these gaps affect the "timeliness, fairness, consistency, and transparency of discipline" of officers, as well as the fairness and transparency for people impacted by police misconduct.</p> <p>Specifically, the OIG noted the following discrepancies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal and Determination of Discipline: Process for determining discipline is "generally consistent and timely," but improvements to transparency and fairness for complainants is needed. • Accountability for Minor Violations: The department's use of the "Not Sustained – Training Referral" designation with recordkeeping restrictions, made in SPOG and SPMA's collective bargaining agreements, creates a gap in accountability for minor violations.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement of Discipline: Suspensions "are not consistently served in a timely manner, and in some cases mitigate the financial impact of discipline. • Disciplinary Records: Several disciplinary actions were not documented, impacting public records requests and employment checks. • Communicating Case Resolution to Complainants: Some complainants did not receive updates on cases, attributed to Office of Police Accountability processes. • Arbitration and Alternatives: A 2017 police accountability ordinance envisioned the Public Safety Civil Service Commission as the "sole route of appeal," providing a different standard of review from SPOG arbitration. The OIG audit found this is not the case, and the commission lacks the capacity to be the sole route of appeal. • SPOG Arbitrator Selection: "Weak controls" of arbitrator selection mean that SPOG grievances have largely not been settled. <p>OIG says more work is needed to look at the impacts of appeals, once the backlog of cases is cleared. Audit findings may also warrant follow-up reviews on things outside the scope of the report, such as rapid adjudication of OPA cases, SPD compliance with SB 5051, supervisor actions, discipline for Equal Employment Opportunity cases, and communication in Not-Sustained cases.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Omicron hits Seattle PD, library workers
SOURCE	https://publicola.com/2022/01/25/omicron-hits-police-library-workers-hard-longtime-city-union-rep-will-head-labor-relations-office/
GIST	<p>In the past month, the COVID-19 virus tore through the Seattle Police Department, placing dozens of officers in quarantine and adding a new strain to the department's already-depleted ranks.</p> <p>On January 12, SPD reported that 124 officers were isolating after testing positive for the virus: more than at any other point during the COVID-19 pandemic, easily surpassing the previous record of 80 officers in quarantine in November 2020. As of last Friday, the number of officers in quarantine had fallen to 85. Nearly 200 SPD employees have tested positive for the virus since the beginning of January, doubling the department's total number of infections since the start of the pandemic.</p> <p>The surge of COVID-19 infections, driven by the highly infectious omicron variant, intensifies a staffing shortage at SPD that has whittled away the department's detective units and left some precincts with only a handful of officers to patrol large areas of the city. With fewer than 1,000 available officers—the lowest number in decades—SPD now routinely relies on non-patrol officers to volunteer for patrol shifts to meet minimum staffing requirements.</p> <p>Another 170 officers are currently on leave, including more than two dozen unvaccinated officers who are burning through their remaining paid leave before they leave the department. The Seattle Police Officers' Guild (SPOG), which represents the department's rank-and-file officers and sergeants, has not reached an agreement with the city about the vaccine mandate for city employees, which went into effect on October 18. SPOG is the only city union that has not reached an agreement with the city about the mandate, and its negotiations appear to have stalled.</p> <p>In contrast, the King County Sheriff's Office is still working with some unvaccinated officers to find accommodations that will allow them to return to work. Sergeant Tim Meyer, a sheriff's office spokesman, told PubliCola that his office hasn't seen enough new COVID-19 cases to pose a challenge for their patrol shifts.</p> <p>The omicron variant is also impacting other city departments where staff interact directly with the public, including the Seattle Public Library, which last week reduced opening hours at branches across the system. For now, many branches will be open only sporadically, starting as late as noon on weekdays, and some will be open just a few partial days each week.</p>

	<p>According to SPL spokeswoman Elisa Murray, 63 library staffers, or about 10 percent of the library's staff, were on a leave of absence (through programs such as the Family and Medical Leave Act) for at least one day during the last two weeks of 2021; in addition, 32 employees were out due to COVID infection or exposure.</p> <p>Compounding the problem, the library was already short-staffed before omicron hit; compared to 2018, the system had about 8.5 percent fewer staffers overall last year. According to Murray, "With a hiring push in the fall of 2021, we were able to restore pre-pandemic hours at most libraries by Dec. 6, just before the Omicron surge began impacting our staffing numbers once again."</p> <p>The library is trying to keep at least two branches in each of its six geographical regions open six or seven days a week so that no one has to travel too far to reach an open branch. Patrons of smaller branches, like Wallingford, Montlake, New Holly, and Northgate may have to travel to other neighborhoods to access services in person.</p> <p>There is no standard pattern for closures across the city: Some branches are closed on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, for example, while others are closed on Saturday and Sunday. Murray suggests checking SPL's website every morning to see which branches are open; the library requires a specific mix of staffers to open a branch, which means that one person calling in sick can be enough to close down a small branch for the day.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Redmond cop in killing was fired as deputy
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/redmond-officer-who-killed-woman-in-2020-had-been-dismissed-from-whatcom-county-sheriffs-office-for-poor-performance-14-months-earlier/
GIST	<p>The Redmond police officer who shot and killed Andrea Churna, an unarmed 39-year-old mother as she tried to surrender to officers in September 2020, had been dismissed as a probationary Whatcom County sheriff's deputy 14 months earlier for poor performance, according to records.</p> <p>Daniel Mendoza, 26, struggled with virtually every aspect of police work during his seven months as a probationary sheriff's deputy, unable to recite statutes, routinely getting lost while responding to calls, writing muddled reports and failing tests on topics ranging from when using force was appropriate to the county's pursuit policies.</p> <p>The preceding 720 hours he spent learning to become a peace officer at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training academy wasn't much better — while he looked sharp and was enthusiastic, he was last in his class academically, and repeatedly failed a key test mock scenario, preventing his graduation. The academy only certified him as a peace officer after Whatcom County intervened to help him pass on his third and last try, according to personnel records obtained through public disclosure by The Seattle Times.</p> <p>"Deputy Mendoza also has had knowledge deficiencies in the area [of] RCW [Revised Code of Washington], policy and case law," wrote Whatcom County Deputy Chief Doug Chadwick in a memo to field training Lt. Rodger Funk in May 2019, after Mendoza's second failed attempt at passing the first phase of field training under an experienced training officer. The revised code is a compilation of all permanent state laws.</p> <p>"He does not have a working knowledge of common RCWs that he should have a strong knowledge of coming out of the academy. Examples of this have been the definition of 'necessary' — a key component in the law governing when police can use deadly force.</p> <p>"Every recruit is required to recite [the definition] verbatim regularly at the academy, yet he could not," Chadwick wrote.</p> <p>Whatcom County Sheriff Bill Elfo, in a separation letter addressed to Mendoza dated May 10, 2019, noted that the "post-academy field training program has been a challenge for you, and the training cadre has</p>

concluded that you are unable to successfully complete your phase one training requirement after two attempts to do so.

“Phase one is a basic level of field training and must be completed before you can be released to more difficult and independent phases” of law enforcement, the sheriff wrote, noting particularly that Mendoza could not consistently write coherent police reports, a “skill [that] is paramount and critical in terms of meeting the basic job requirements for deputy sheriff.

After a “thorough review” of Mendoza’s overall performance, Elfo accepted recommendations from his staff “that [Mendoza] not be retained as a deputy sheriff” and fired him.

Within a month, Redmond would hire him as a rookie police officer. The current Redmond chief, Darrell Lowe, said Mendoza was hired by his predecessor, former Chief Kristi Wilson, and that he could not comment on her decision. Wilson, who left the Redmond PD on June 7, 2019, did not return a telephone call seeking comment.

Messages seeking comment from Mendoza left with his union attorney, Lisa Elliott, and Chief Lowe, were not returned.

A public disclosure request seeking Mendoza’s personnel records with Redmond filed by The Times on Dec. 31, 2021, remains pending.

Minutes of a Redmond Civil Service Commission meeting on April 15, 2020, noted that Mendoza had completed the department’s field training requirements and had graduated to patrol officer, a job the department confirmed he holds today.

On Sept. 20, 2020, Mendoza, armed with a high-powered rifle, shot Andrea Churna, the divorced mother of a 7-year-old boy, six times from a distance of 30 feet as she lay outside the door of her upscale Redmond apartment. Churna was on her stomach, her arms outstretched and ankles crossed — “proned out,” was the description Mendoza gave radio dispatchers.

Churna, the daughter of a retired Michigan State Police commander, was having a mental crisis and called police for help because she thought someone was trying to break into her apartment to kill her. Before officers arrived, Churna had fired a single shot from a handgun into the door of her apartment, according to records. The handgun had malfunctioned and was found on a patio table in her apartment after she was killed, according to the investigation.

Shortly after officers responded to Churna’s 911 call for help, she had exited her apartment purportedly carrying a handgun, and two other Redmond officers — Ty Tomlinson and Evan Barnard — claim she pointed the weapon at them. They fired at least eight rounds in a crossfire that sent bullets through neighboring apartment walls. The investigation concluded that Churna, who ran back into her apartment unscathed, did not fire at the officers.

According to officer statements, she came out of the apartment a second time unarmed, hands up, dressed in a T-shirt and yoga pants, and was ordered to the floor. At least six officers were crowded at the end of the corridor, guns drawn, some yelling obscenity-laced commands. At least one officer was carrying a bulletproof ballistic shield.

Churna had a cellphone and had called her ex-husband, telling officers she wanted to surrender to him. Tim Churna was in the parking lot, being questioned by officers, when the shots were fired.

In written statements given to the King County Sheriff’s Office days after the shooting by their union attorney, several Redmond officers said Churna was squirming on the floor and slowly rotating to face her apartment door. They wrote that they feared that she was going to retrieve a gun from her apartment.

Mendoza, however, was the only officer who fired his weapon at that point. He has never provided a statement to King County detectives and has declined to be interviewed, according to sheriff's documents.

The King County Prosecutor's Office has said it will not make a final decision on whether criminal charges should be filed pending a coroner's inquest, which could be years away. The Churna shooting is 43rd on a list of at least 52 pending inquests.

Chief Lowe has ordered an internal investigation to determine whether any department policies were violated. The results are pending.

Mendoza, who had spent the previous four years in the Navy, was hired by the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office on Oct. 2, 2018, and sent to the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission's Basic Law Enforcement Academy, where records show he struggled with academics and missed several classes.

However, in a series of weekly letters written to training officers in Whatcom County, Mendoza remained enthusiastic and determined to do well and noted that he was particularly adept at firearms training.

On Dec. 5, 2018, he wrote, "I am excelling in firearms, but am considering on taking extra training to work more on my draw and sight alignment.

"Although I understand I may never use my weapon while in the field, I want to stay proficient in all aspects of my training," he wrote. Later, in a letter explaining why he had missed 14 hours of training in firearms, control tactics and criminal law due to family issues, he noted that he had been working on his shooting at his "home range" and promised to make up the missed classes.

However, the personnel records show that Mendoza did poorly on academy tests in criminal law, defensive tactics, criminal investigations and the Basic Law Enforcement Academy comprehensive final, and twice failed the academy's field-interview mock scenario, failing to find a gun on one suspect and drugs on another. As a result, he did not graduate with his class, according to a letter sent to Elfo, the sheriff, by the state's Basic Law Enforcement Academy commander Rex Caldwell on Feb. 27, 2019. Caldwell said a third failure in the mock scenario would wash him out of the academy.

In response, Whatcom County put Mendoza through a week of remedial training that included one-on-one coaching on case law and tactics. Only then, according to a May 9, 2019, memo from Chief Criminal Deputy Doug Chadwick to former Undersheriff Jeff Parks, was Mendoza able to pass the mock scenario and win police officer certification.

Records show he repeatedly got lost on his way to service calls and often had to refer to manuals and other materials to refresh his memory of commonly used laws and policies. His report writing routinely lacked the necessary details and was rife with typographical and grammatical errors.

"It was also noted that Deputy Mendoza did not appear to retain knowledge from the academy with respect to common RCWs," Chadwick wrote. "During verbal quizzes, Deputy Mendoza as often unable to properly identify the elements of the crime for common violation of law that deputies encounter on a regular basis.

"In reviewing the totality of the circumstances, Deputy Mendoza is unable to meet the performance expectations of the sheriff's office," Chadwick concluded, and recommended to Elfo that he be terminated. The following day, he was.

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HEADLINE	01/25 King Co. bonus for deputies to stay in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/king-county-offers-sheriffs-deputies-4000-bonus-to-stay-on-through-end-of-2022

GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. - The King County Sheriff's Office is paying commissioned employees a \$4,000 bonus to stay with the department through the end of 2022.</p> <p>It's just one of several bonuses being offered to sheriff's office employees as part of an agreement with the King County Police Officers Guild.</p> <p>A memorandum of understanding obtained by FOX 13 News also shows other bonuses being offered by the county including a \$15,000 for lateral hires of deputies, a \$7,500 bonus for news hires of deputies, and referral bonus of \$5,000 for bargaining unit members who successfully refer candidates who become a deputy.</p> <p>Employees who receive the retention bonus must stay employed with the sheriff's office through the end of the year.</p> <p>According to the memo, payments will be made to those employed with the sheriff's office as of Jan. 1, 2021 no later than Feb. 17, 2022.</p> <p>"Any employee who receives the \$4,000 retention bonus must remain employed by KCSO through December 31, 2022, or they will be required to return the entire retention bonus. Except, any employee that separates employment by disability or death, or any employee that retires in 2022 with 45 days advance notice to KCSO prior to their retirement date shall not be required to return the retention bonus."</p> <p>King County Executive Dow Constantine announced in Nov. that he appointed Patti Cole-Tindall as the interim King County Sheriff.</p> <p>Previous Sheriff Mitzi Johanknecht's term ended and Cole-Tindall took over duties on Jan. 1, 2022.</p> <p>King County voters decided last year to make the sheriff an appointed position and not an elected position. The County Executive now appoints a sheriff and the Metropolitan King County Council confirms the decision.</p> <p>The King County Sheriff's Office employs around 1,100 people. As of Nov. 2021, there were about 60 open positions with many of them on the patrol unit.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall told FOX 13 in late 2021 that she supported Constantine's proposal to give out retention and hiring bonuses.</p> <p>"Overall in the profession of law enforcement, it's difficult. People don't want to do this work anymore. The young people-- they see defund and they see non-support," Cole-Tindall said.</p> <p>But she also supports reimagining the role of law enforcement as well as diversifying the force.</p> <p>"Bring in diversity, women, people of color so that the sheriff's office reflects the community," Cole-Tindall said.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall says outside of commissioned deputies, the civilian workforce is understaffed, that they do a lot with less.</p> <p>She says she will try to beef up resources for people who work in divisions like the records department to 911 dispatch.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Stocks end lower in turbulent session
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-stocks-markets-dow-update-01-25-2022-11643081252?mod=hp_lead_pos1&mod=hp_lead_pos1

U.S. stock indexes tumbled, partly recovered and then retreated again in a second straight day of tumultuous trading, highlighting investor anxiety over the likely path of Federal Reserve interest-rate increases ahead of the central bank's regular meeting.

Tuesday's trading continues a topsy-turvy start to 2022 for stocks, which has dragged the S&P 500 down 8.6%, on track for the worst month since March 2020.

All three major indexes fell Tuesday, though they closed well off session lows. The S&P 500 fell 53.68 points, or 1.2%, to 4356.45. The technology-heavy Nasdaq Composite lost 315.83, or 2.3%, to 13539.29. The blue-chip Dow Jones Industrial Average lost almost 820 points before closing down 66.77 points, or 0.2%, at 34297.73.

The S&P 500 fell as much as 2.8% before staging a recovery.

The moves followed another [jarring intraday reversal Monday](#). The Dow recovered from losses of more than 1000 points for the first time in history. The Nasdaq recorded its biggest reversal since 2008.

Major indexes again pared big losses late in Tuesday's session, leaving some traders bewildered about the midday reversal. Though stocks have stabilized somewhat in recent sessions after weeks of declines, the moves leave many investors with lingering uncertainty about the market's course the rest of the month.

"My fear is we are going to go lower," said Zhiwei Ren, a portfolio manager at Penn Mutual Asset Management. It is "going to be a big week."

[Concerns about the Fed](#) have driven investors out of stocks and stoked worries that the popular trade of buying small dips was growing weaker, potentially removing one source of support for the stock market. Monday's comeback and Tuesday's rebound showed that many investors were quick to pounce on beaten-down stocks, though some of that enthusiasm appeared to fade late in the trading session.

Some portfolio managers said that they had used the January selloff to find bargains and add to their stockholdings.

"It is encouraging that the market seems to be trying to find a floor here," said Ryan Jacob, chief investment officer at Jacob Asset Management. "You get this kind of action when you near a market bottom."

Mr. Jacob said people appeared to be wading back into the market after weeks of aggressive selling. He said that he has recently bought shares of small and midcap tech and healthcare companies that have been beaten down, positioning for a rebound.

"It makes us more emboldened, rather than if the market was making new lows," Mr. Jacob said, of the recent trading activity. He expects things to remain volatile until the Federal Reserve's two-day meeting ends Wednesday.

Behind the selloff are fears about the Fed raising interest rates this year and withdrawing the stimulus that propelled markets in recent years. Fed officials are set to debate the path of monetary policy, including the speed at which they could shrink the [nearly \\$9 trillion bond portfolio](#), at their policy meeting. Chairman Jerome Powell is expected to use his postmeeting comments to lay the groundwork for a cycle of interest-rate increases.

Some investors said they no longer expect the so-called Fed put—or the Fed's tendency to cut rates or hold off on rate increases in response to market turmoil—to stay in place.

Meanwhile, earnings have failed to deliver the bumper beats investors became accustomed to last year, while geopolitical tensions surrounding Ukraine and Russia have weighed on sentiment.

Around 77% of companies reporting results so far have surpassed analysts' expectations, according to Refinitiv. But that hasn't been enough to lift stocks. General Electric fell \$5.80, or 6%, to \$91.11 after reporting a fourth-quarter loss of \$3.8 billion. Meanwhile, 3M shares added 95 cents, or 0.6%, to \$173.75 after the company reported a better-than-expected performance.

This week, investors are parsing results from tech heavyweights including Microsoft, Apple and Tesla. They have been among the companies weighing on the S&P 500 the most this year, according to Goldman Sachs.

"I would expect that there would be a lot of volatility through earnings," said Tiffany Wade, a senior portfolio manager at Columbia Threadneedle. But, she said "we've taken the opportunity in the selloff to add to companies that we think are high quality."

Technology shares have fared the worst of any group in the S&P 500, falling 13% this month, and they were the biggest laggards on Tuesday. Energy stocks have been the sole winners in January, advancing around 18%. On Tuesday, nine out of 11 of the S&P 500's sectors declined, with energy and financials stocks notching gains.

While earnings in 2021 were a source of strength for equity markets, recent results suggest companies are beginning to struggle with inflation and slowing economic growth, said David Donabedian, chief investment officer at CIBC Private Wealth.

"We have gotten so used to this cycle of companies blowing the roof off of earnings expectations, but so far that is not happening," he said.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year U.S. Treasury note rose to 1.784%, from 1.735% Monday. Bond yields move inversely to prices.

Overseas, Japan's Nikkei 225 closed down 1.7%. South Korea's Kospi Composite retreated more than 2.5%. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index shed 1.7%.

European stocks rebounded. The pan-continental Stoxx Europe 600 index was up 0.7% Tuesday.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Imports drop at Calif. ports; backup grows
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/imports-drop-at-southern-california-ports-as-ship-backup-grows-11643143742?mod=hp_list_pos5
GIST	<p>Imports are tumbling at the nation's busiest container port complex even as the backup of ships waiting to unload there breaks records.</p> <p>Combined inbound volume fell about 14% at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, Calif., in December compared to one year ago, according to preliminary data from the ports. It was the fourth straight month of year-over-year declines.</p> <p>That was even as the backlog of container ships off the coast of Southern California kept growing. The queue of vessels waiting to enter the port complex rose past 100 during December, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California, and reached a record 109 ships in early January.</p> <p>Shipping industry officials say the factors that triggered big bottlenecks earlier in 2021 persisted through December and have continued into 2022. Ships can't unload quickly because terminals are full of containers. Truckers can't pick up loads due to a shortage of drivers and the steel trailers used to pull boxes. Warehouses near the ports and at nearby logistics hubs are short workers and don't have space for more deliveries.</p>

Port congestion is a major worry for the Biden administration. The backups are exacerbating supply-chain delays and driving up shipping costs that are contributing to inflation reaching its highest level in decades.

A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Transportation said the ports have made progress in recent months in speeding up the movement of some import containers from terminals to truck yards and warehouses.

Rather than freeing up space, however, the boxes filling up the dockside terminals have been replaced with empty containers waiting for shipment back to Asia, said Jim McKenna, chief executive of the Pacific Maritime Association, which represents terminal operators.

Mr. McKenna said five to 10 of the roughly 35 ships at berths on a typical day aren't being unloaded because terminals don't have space to put the boxes. He said the congestion has gotten worse in recent weeks because of [a surge of Covid-19 cases](#) among longshore workers, truckers and warehouse staff.

So far this month, about 1,700 West Coast dock workers have tested positive for the virus. That is more longshore Covid cases than in all of 2021, Mr. McKenna said.

The slump in inbound volume in Southern California capped a year in which the port complex broke records with massive imports. In 2021, the two ports combined handled the equivalent of 10.1 million containers, according to port data, a 12% increase compared to the previous record set in 2018.

Some shipping industry specialists attribute the end-of-year declines, in part, to a supply-chain workforce that is worn out.

Jock O'Connell, an international trade adviser at research firm Beacon Economics, noted cargo volume at the complex surged in late summer of 2020 and remained high for the next year, peaking in May of 2021. "You've got a workforce that has been stressed out since the summer of 2020," Mr. O'Connell said. "There is a point where there's a natural limit in the number of containers you can continue to put through the supply chain."

The backlog in Southern California has pushed importers to search for alternate ocean gateways. FedEx Corp. recently launched a charter service carrying up to 300 containers to Port Hueneme, Calif., a small gateway 80 miles up the coast known mostly as an import hub for bananas.

John McCown, a shipping industry veteran and founder of Blue Alpha Capital, said import volumes at Gulf and East Coast ports rose during the second half of this year as West Coast volumes declined, suggesting a shift to less congested parts of the country. Now, container ships are starting to back up at those ports too.

The Biden administration has tried for months to reduce backlogs, especially at Los Angeles and Long Beach which together handle about 40% of U.S. container imports. The White House announced in October that terminals in Southern California would operate around the clock to speed the flow of containers to manufacturers and retailers, but the initiative has failed to attract truckers. "We've had very few takers," said Gene Seroke, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles.

Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero cautioned that annual comparisons are complicated because import volumes at the end of 2020 surged to record monthly levels. Mr. Cordero said many of the recent initiatives to move greater cargo volumes need more time to take effect. "The question we need to ask ourselves is what if we did nothing?" Mr. Cordero said. "Things would have been much worse."

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HEADLINE	01/25 Workers: flexible hours over remote work
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/workers-care-more-about-flexible-hours-than-remote-work-11643112004?mod=hp_listc_pos3

Workers, [flush with power](#) as employers raise wages and scramble to fill [open jobs](#), say they care even more about flexible schedules than whether or not they go into an office.

Ninety-five percent of people surveyed want flexible hours, compared with 78% of workers who want location flexibility, according to a new report from Future Forum, a consortium focused on reimagining the future of work led by Slack Technologies Inc.

The new data, collected in November 2021 from a survey of more than 10,000 knowledge workers, offers a snapshot into just how popular hybrid arrangements have become in the second year of the pandemic, how virtually all workers prize schedule flexibility above all and the growing concerns that many bosses have about [how to keep promotions and pay fair](#) when some employees are in the office while others stay home.

The survey also found that 72% of workers who weren't happy with their level of flexibility—whether time or location—are likely to seek out a new opportunity in the next year.

“If they're not getting what they want, they're open to looking for a new job,” said Sheela Subramanian, vice president of the Future Forum.

Many employers have reluctantly embraced long-term hybrid and remote work arrangements after repeatedly postponing return-to-office dates or finding that workers pushed back on going to the office. That has some executives thinking differently about in-person arrangements.

Maeve O'Meara, chief executive officer of San Francisco healthcare-technology company Castlight Health Inc., said her employees should gather only when there is a specific need to do so. “We should really be organizing around bringing people together for an explicit purpose, whether that's collaboration, innovation, planning or just socializing,” she said.

Agreements between team members about when people in the group will work are growing in popularity across industries, said Ms. Subramanian. Flexible schedules are likely to endure beyond the pandemic, she said.

Focusing on how many hours people are working is outdated, she said: “It really needs to be a shift from presenteeism and activity tracking to actually understanding the results that people are driving and the value that they're creating.”

The Future Forum survey, which was conducted between Nov. 1 and Nov. 30, also found that the share of people working in hybrid models, where they split their time between an office and a remote location, increased by 12 percentage points since May, as more workers have returned part-time to their traditional workplaces. More than two-thirds of those surveyed said a hybrid setup was their preferred way of working.

Many workers have found their productivity surged while working from home and they achieved the work-life balance they had been seeking—one reason so many people see hybrid work as the future, said Brian Kropp, who leads human-resources research at Gartner, an advisory and research firm.

“Two years into working remote and hybrid, our muscles have been built. We know how to make this work. People love the flexibility. Companies love the cost savings,” he said.

While many large companies have decided that the majority of their employees will combine remote work with in-office days, hybrid work has its downsides. Executives have growing concerns that hybrid work could increase inequity among rank-and-file employees, especially women, working mothers and people of color, who when surveyed said they were more likely to prefer flexible arrangements.

Among executives surveyed, 71% said they work in the office at least three days a week; 63% of nonexecutive employees said they go in as often. There is a sharper divide between their preferences.

	<p>Executives working remotely were far more likely than nonexecutives to say they want to work at least three days a week in the office, at 75% versus 37% of employees.</p> <p>What employees want may not be the most effective way for organizations to operate, said Nicholas Bloom, a professor of economics at Stanford University who researches remote work. “There is going to be a battle royale over choice versus coordination,” he said.</p> <p>In a forthcoming survey that Mr. Bloom conducted, some initial results align with Future Forum’s employee sentiment on the importance of flexibility. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed by Mr. Bloom want to choose the days they work from home, as opposed to their employer telling them which days to go in.</p> <p>“Firms are going to be reluctant to force employees to coordinate,” Mr. Bloom said. “It’s not going to go well because on any given day 20% are going to be at home.”</p> <p>Large meetings are harder to conduct if some people are in office and some are remote, he said. People inside companies complain about the lack of energy in the workplace when it is sparsely populated. Forcing a one-size-fits-all solution across a large workforce can seem risky to managers, he said, at a time many workers are a flight risk.</p> <p>“They’re going to feel like they’re going to have to let them choose,” Mr. Bloom said of companies.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Seattle upholds grocery worker hazard pay
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3325371/with-divisive-vote-seattle-council-upholds-grocery-worker-hazard-pay-ordinance/
GIST	<p>Seattle City Council has voted to maintain a \$4 an hour hazard pay requirement for the city’s grocery store employees.</p> <p>The council’s relationship to hazard pay is as changeable as King County’s COVID numbers. The council had originally sunset the requirement in December with a unanimous vote, before overall case rates began to peak and hospitals started to see an influx of intensive care patients with COVID complications.</p> <p>Later that month, former Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan would veto the move to end hazard pay, citing a then 143% increase in COVID cases in King County over the previous week.</p> <p>The hazard pay requirement legislation was originally passed in February 2021, designed to provide added compensation for those working on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Tuesday, the council ultimately voted 2-5 to reject ending the hazard pay requirement, declining to override the mayoral veto, effectively maintaining the hazard pay ordinance.</p> <p>Councilmembers Alex Pedersen (District 4) and Sara Nelson (Position 9) voted to repeal hazard pay, and Councilmembers Kshama Sawant (District 3), Lisa Herbold (District 1), Andrew Lewis (District 7), Tammy Morales (District 2) and Debora Juarez (District 5) voted in affirmation of the requirement. Councilmembers Dan Strauss (District 6) and Teresa Mosqueda (Position 8) were not present.</p> <p>The vote became a flash point of tension among the council. While hazard pay is usually couched by the council as a function of public health concern related to COVID, Councilmember Sawant views the requirement as a labor issue, calling it “watered down” legislation, ultimately about “workers’ rights” that should be expanded to all frontline, low wage employees.</p> <p>Earlier Tuesday, Sawant delivered a speech affirming her commitment to ongoing unionization efforts in Seattle in which she announced a push to streamline organized labor efforts at Starbucks locations in</p>

the Seattle area. A focal point of her speech was criticism of the council’s decision to sunset hazard pay in December.

“Seven of the eight Democrats currently on the city council voted just last month to end the \$4 an hour hazard pay for our grocery workers,” Sawant said in a Jan. 25 speech.

“If you as a politician claim to be pro-worker and pro-union... and then vote [to repeal hazard pay] then you are showing yourself to be anti-worker, anti-union ... So what is going to be? Workers want to know, which side are you on?”

Councilmembers Nelson and Pedersen countered that position with the point that the legislation in support of the pay increase was originally drafted explicitly as a response to the COVID pandemic, and with positive cases once again trending down in King County, “I think that we’re at that time for appropriate next steps,” Nelson said in council sessions Jan. 25.

Nelson also invoked inflation and grocery price increases for “working families” which, in her view, cannot abide government-brokered pay increases.

“I have spoken with PCC [Community Markets] ...and they’re really struggling with this significant pay increase,” Nelson continued.

“[I’m] concerned about their viability because, if they close, those jobs go away, and the neighborhood loses that asset... We’re talking about largely family-owned [stores], and if they don’t close, they might have to raise their prices, and we already know what’s happening with prices. With all the supply chain problems, they’re already going up and working families are hurting.”

The Northwest Grocery Association echoed that sentiment in a statement, writing, “We are extremely frustrated with the Seattle City Council’s decision today to accept Mayor Durkan’s veto of the Council’s December 13 unanimous decision to repeal Seattle’s completely unfair and illogical hazard pay ordinance.”

“While many municipalities in Washington and California passed these ordinances in 2021, Seattle is now the only city in the county to still have hazard pay in effect a full year later, and this is because other cities recognize that imposing hazard pay on one small sector of one industry is punitive, arbitrary and unnecessary,” the statement continues. “In this time of inflation, this ordinance is not only inequitable but also adds real risk that prices for food and basic needs will increase even more for Seattle households.”

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HEADLINE	01/25 Magnolia phone, internet outage 2-3 weeks
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3323419/homes-in-magnolia-area-without-internet-after-cables-cut-stolen/
GIST	<p>Homes and businesses in Seattle’s Magnolia neighborhood have been without phone and internet service for five days, and now, CenturyLink says that repairs may take up to three weeks.</p> <p>The outage is being blamed on a pair of vandalism-related incidents from late last week. CenturyLink crews say that it appears as though someone cut through a wooden box running under the Magnolia Bridge that holds fiber-optic cables. Cables and copper wiring were then stolen.</p> <p>After initial repairs, some homes in the area had their service restored on Saturday. But completed repairs were then vandalized again, and because of that, CenturyLink estimates that full restoration of service to Magnolia could take 2-3 weeks.</p> <p>Rob Benson, a front desk worker at Coldwell Banker Bain Real Estate downtown Magnolia, told KIRO Newsradio that their phone and internet were down for four days, before eventually coming back online on</p>

	<p>Monday. To make matters worse, the outage has caused an alarm to ring nonstop in the building since last Thursday.</p> <p>Benson says he's never seen an outage like this in three years working in the neighborhood.</p> <p>And while CenturyLink was able to work out a fix for the real estate office, others in the area have not been as lucky. The company says that it will be reaching out customers with direct updates on individual situations "soon."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Seattle Starbucks locations push for union
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3325145/trio-seattle-starbucks-pushing-for-union/
GIST	<p>Organized labor reached Starbucks' headquarters Tuesday morning, when Seattle Councilmember Kshama Sawant demanded council support for Starbucks worker unionization efforts across the region.</p> <p>Sawant delivered a speech on Tuesday outside of Starbucks Center in Seattle's SoDo neighborhood, where she dedicated \$10,000 from her solidarity fund to Starbucks Workers United—the union which represents national labor organizing in 30 current Starbucks locations. She also announced the introduction of a council resolution which calls on Starbucks to accept card check neutrality.</p> <p>Card check neutrality has the potential to streamline the unionization process. It allows employees and new hires to indicate if they desire union representation. If a majority says "yes", the company would recognize Starbucks Workers United (an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union) as a bargaining entity, circumventing the standard National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election process.</p> <p>This comes in the wake of Starbucks employees at Capitol Hill's Broadway and Denny Way location filing for union elections on Dec. 20. Two additional Seattle-based stores — one at Westlake and another at Fifth and Pike — also filed for union elections with the NLRB on Monday, Jan. 24, an NLRB spokesperson confirmed.</p> <p>"By voting yes on the resolution, Seattle City Councilmembers will take a stand with Starbucks workers rather than just saying woke things things when they don't matter," Sawant said in her speech. "They will call on Starbucks corporation to accept card check neutrality, which is recognizing a union when the majority of a workforce signs union cards and allows employees to discuss unionization, free from intimidation and anti-union propaganda."</p> <p>Organizing members at the Capitol Hill Starbucks location told MyNorthwest that the company has engaged in "stalling tactics" to delay a unionization vote. According to the employees, Starbucks Corporation's argument to the NLRB has been contingent on the idea that stores can only file for union elections as a district, rather than as individual locations.</p> <p>"Starbucks is coming in and saying 'no, our stores are so interconnected that the appropriate unit is the district ... because one store organizing and becoming a union would affect the entire district so drastically,'" Broadway and Denny Starbucks employee Sydney Durkin told MyNorthwest.</p> <p>"It's been tossed out in Buffalo in Arizona, and we assume it'll be tossed out here as well," she added. "It's a stalling tactic."</p> <p>To date, two Starbucks locations in Buffalo, NY, have won union elections.</p> <p>"We're very confident that we will win this case ... In the hearing, the judge opened with the burden of proof is on the employer to prove that a single store ... is an [inappropriate] bargaining unit," Durkin continued.</p>

“Starbucks has a really uphill battle trying to prove that case for a lot of reasons. One is because district lines are redrawn every single year — they’re really arbitrary. Starbucks basically can prove that the district manager has enough jurisdiction over individual stores more than the store manager ... Legally to the NLRB, it’s basically impossible to prove that.”

Union elections at the Capitol Hill location have yet to be scheduled.

An [unfair labor practices complaint](#) was filed against Starbucks Corporation Jan. 21, which alleges that the company “unlawfully disciplined a bargaining unit member in retaliation for her protected concerted activity in support of the Workers United organizing drive.”

“We were really kind of left alone for a very long time until today [Jan. 20] when they brought in our district manager, and another store manager,” Rachel Ybarra, another organizing member, told MyNorthwest.

A Starbucks spokesperson told KIRO 7’s Lauren Donovan the company denies any claims of union busting, and they support a worker’s right to unionize.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Commerce Dept. warns microchip shortage
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/01/25/semiconductor-shortage-inventory-2022-chips/
GIST	<p>Manufacturers and other buyers of computer chips had less than five days’ supply of some chips on hand late last year, leaving them vulnerable to any disruptions in deliveries, the Commerce Department reported Tuesday as it pushed Congress to endorse federal aid for chip makers.</p> <p>The report highlighted the severity of a global shortage that has hobbled manufacturing and fueled inflation for more than a year and that defies easy solutions.</p> <p>Manufacturers’ median chip inventory levels have plummeted from about 40 days’ supply in 2019 to less than five days, according to a survey of 150 companies worldwide that the Commerce Department conducted in September.</p> <p>“This means a disruption overseas, which might shut down a semiconductor plant for 2-3 weeks, has the potential to disable a manufacturing facility and furlough workers in the United States if that facility only has 3-5 days of inventory,” the Commerce Department concluded in a six-page summary of its findings.</p> <p>The lack of chip inventory leaves auto manufacturers and other chip users with “no room for error,” Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said Tuesday as she presented the findings.</p> <p>“A covid outbreak, a storm, a natural disaster, political instability, problem with equipment — really anything that disrupts a [chip-making] facility anywhere in the world, we will feel the ramifications here in the United States of America,” she said. “A covid outbreak in Malaysia has the potential to shut down a manufacturing facility in America.”</p> <p>“The reality is Congress must act,” Raimondo added, urging lawmakers to pass a proposal for \$52 billion in federal subsidies to incentivize construction of chip factories. “Every day we wait, we fall further behind.”</p> <p>The Senate passed the measure last year. After months of delay, the House on Tuesday introduced its own version of the legislation, which matches the Senate’s \$52 billion appropriation. In a statement, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said she aims to get the bill to the president’s desk as soon as possible.</p> <p>Industry executives say federal funding is likely to create more long-term supply of chips but not to alleviate the short-term shortages because chip factories take years to build.</p>

Survey respondents said they didn't see the shortages going away in the next six months. Some industry executives say they [could last into 2023](#).

Median demand for chips among buyers that responded to the survey was as much as 17 percent higher in 2021 than 2019, as consumer purchases of electronics surged during the pandemic, and as [more products required computer chips to function](#).

The report found that computer chips based on older technology are in particularly short supply, creating special problems for manufacturers, including automakers, that need them.

Boosting production of this sort of chip will be challenging because the profit margins aren't as high, making them less attractive for chip makers, said Charles Clancy, senior vice president of Mitre Corp., a nonprofit company that runs federally funded research centers.

"It's kind of like the generic-drug problem in pharmaceuticals," he said. These older chips "are not cutting-edge."

A lack of chips forced auto manufacturers worldwide to idle factories and slash output by as much as 7.7 million cars last year, causing shortages of new and used vehicles. The collapse in auto sales to consumers because of the chip shortage [shaved more than two percentage points from U.S. gross domestic product growth](#) in the third quarter.

Raimondo said soaring car prices accounted for a third of overall inflation last year, [which rose to 7 percent, a 40-year high](#).

"This new data underscores that it's time to stop dragging our feet on this. The House has been sitting for months on a good bill to build more semiconductors here in the U.S., and there's urgency to act now," Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-Va.), a vocal supporter of the legislation, said Tuesday.

The Commerce Department survey found that chips sold through brokers often came with especially high price tags. "So we are going to focus more acutely on that issue: What's going on, why are the brokers charging so much?" Raimondo said.

U.S. chip maker Intel [last week announced it will spend \\$20 billion](#) to build two new chip factories in Ohio, aiming to complete the work in 2025. Intel's chief executive said that work would proceed faster if the company receives some of the proposed federal subsidies.

In the early 1990s the United States was home to about 37 percent of global chip manufacturing, but that has dropped to about 12 percent in recent years as more production shifted to Asia.

About 75 percent of chip production today takes place in East Asia, and over 90 percent of the most advanced chips are manufactured in Taiwan — a particular vulnerability for the United States, [given China's aggression toward the democratic island](#), U.S. officials have said.

Some lawmakers, including Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) have voiced opposition to the subsidies, saying the semiconductor industry is highly profitable and doesn't need federal aid.

Asked about this Tuesday, Raimondo said that because the cost of building chip factories is higher in the United States than it is overseas, the federal government must offer subsidies if it wants chip makers to build here.

"We want these companies to set up their manufacturing facilities in America," she said. "So that's why this is necessary. This isn't just an economic issue, it's a national security issue," she added, noting that high-tech chips are needed for military equipment, quantum computing and artificial-intelligence applications.

	She also called the \$52 billion of proposed federal money a “drop in the bucket” compared with the “hundreds of billions” that industry must spend if it is to build more factories domestically. “Every company is going to have to invest an enormous amount of their own capital in order to hit the goal,” she said.
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HEADLINE	01/25 WHO: pandemic ‘entering new phase’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/25/covid-who-pandemic-omicron-endgame/
GIST	<p>There is hope in the air.</p> <p>Growing global immunity from the highly transmissible omicron coronavirus variant, coupled with encouraging downward trends of infections in a number of countries, seems to have caused a shift in tone among global public health officials, who are oh-so-cautiously signaling the pandemic may be entering a more manageable stage.</p> <p>The World Health Organization marked two years since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in Europe and central Asia on Monday and said it was “entering a new phase.”</p> <p>“The pandemic is far from over, but I am hopeful we can end the emergency phase in 2022 and address other health threats that urgently require our attention,” Hans Kluge, WHO regional director for Europe, said in a statement.</p> <p>He said the omicron variant offered “plausible hope for stabilization and normalization” in Europe but warned “our work is not done.”</p> <p>The omicron variant is displacing the delta variant at unprecedented speed in many countries and appears to cause less severe illness, Kluge said. Hospitalizations with the omicron variant also seem to result in lower intensive care unit admissions, he added.</p> <p>“I believe that a new wave could no longer require the return to pandemic-era, population-wide lockdowns or similar measures,” Kluge said.</p> <p>“This pandemic, like all other pandemics before it, will end, but it is far too early to relax,” he said.</p> <p>Speaking separately on Monday, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also said the emergency phase of the pandemic could end this year if 70 percent of the population of every country got vaccinated, among other criteria.</p> <p>But he also doused his optimism with a strong note of caution.</p> <p>“It is dangerous to assume that omicron will be the last variant, or that we are in the endgame,” Ghebreyesus told an executive board meeting.</p> <p>He also told journalists: “We are at a critical juncture. ... We must work together to bring the acute phase of this pandemic to an end. We cannot let it continue to drag on, lurching between panic and neglect.”</p> <p>The remarks come as a new descendant of the omicron variant, known as BA. 2, was identified this week. The WHO recommended Monday that officials begin investigating its characteristics to determine whether it poses new challenges for pandemic-weary nations. Viruses mutate constantly, mostly in harmless ways, and there is no current evidence that BA. 2 is more virulent, spreads faster or escapes immunity than omicron.</p> <p>Ghebreyesus also argued for the fairer distribution of vaccines globally to stop the pandemic from being prolonged and to prevent the emergence of new variants — only about 40 nations globally have fully vaccinated more than 70 percent of their populations so far, according to data from Johns Hopkins</p>

University. Countries such as Burundi and Haiti have fully vaccinated less than 1 percent of their populations.

Some countries have moved to relax their social restrictions, including Britain, Thailand, South Africa and France. The Netherlands is also expected to announce later Tuesday the reopening of its bars and restaurants.

In the United States, health experts have said that although the country has yet to reach its national peak of the omicron variant, the explosion of cases has begun to plateau in some areas. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy told journalists last week that “the challenge is that the entire country is not moving at the same pace. The omicron wave started later in other parts of the country.”

Chief medical adviser Anthony S. Fauci has said in recent days that it’s hard to say definitively whether the coronavirus was moving into an endemic phase. “We do not know that — and we have to be openly honest about that,” Fauci said Monday during a virtual panel session of the World Economic Forum.

“I think that’s what most people feel when they talk about endemicity, where it’s integrated into the broad range of infectious diseases that we experience,” Fauci added. As to whether the omicron variant could drive the coronavirus into that phase, he said, “I would hope that that’s the case, but that would only be the case if we don’t get another variant that eludes the immune response.”

Tom Frieden, former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, also sounded a positive note.

“I’m more optimistic about our ability to tame the pandemic than at any point since its emergence,” he tweeted Monday. “Unless, of course, a worse variant emerges, with the infectivity of Omicron and as deadly as Delta. That’s possible, but doesn’t change our ability to move forward if we vaccinate, mask, strengthen public health, and increase vaccine production capacity.”

Some scientists have previously speculated that the massive winter wave of omicron variant infections in the United States might produce a silver lining in the long run. They have said that the variant, while stunningly contagious, appears less likely to send someone to the hospital and that its transmissibility could boost immunity as it rips through the population. In doing so, once the tide of cases has ebbed, the variant could make the pandemic a less dangerous health emergency.

Other health officials, however, have pushed back, arguing that too much remains unknown about the virus to make such forecasts and that every time experts suggest it is nearing the endgame, the virus comes up with a new mutation. They also note that any broad immunity boost has come at a very high cost — with covid-19 responsible for the deaths of some 5.6 million people globally.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Rich countries lure health workers away
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/24/health/covid-health-worker-immigration.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Health
GIST	<p>LUSAKA, Zambia — There are few nurses in the Zambian capital with the skills and experience of Alex Mulumba, who works in the operating room at a critical care hospital. But he has recently learned, through a barrage of social media posts and LinkedIn solicitations, that many faraway places are eager for his expertise, too — and will pay him far more than the \$415 per month (including an \$8 health risk bonus) he earns now.</p> <p>Mr. Mulumba, 31, is considering those options, particularly Canada, where friends of his have immigrated and quickly found work. “You have to build something with your life,” he said.</p> <p>Canada is among numerous wealthy nations, including the United States and United Kingdom, that are aggressively recruiting medical workers from the developing world to replenish a health care work force</p>

drastically depleted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The urgency and strong pull from high-income nations — including countries like Germany and Finland, which had not previously recruited health workers from abroad — has upended migration patterns and raised new questions about the ethics of recruitment from countries with weak health systems during a pandemic.

“We have absolutely seen an increase in international migration,” said Howard Catton, the chief executive of the International Council of Nurses. But, he added, “The high, high risk is that you are recruiting nurses from countries that can least afford to lose their nurses.”

About 1,000 nurses are arriving in the United States each month from African nations, the Philippines and the Caribbean, said Sinead Carbery, president of O’Grady Peyton International, an international recruiting firm. While the United States has long drawn nurses from abroad, she said demand from American health care facilities is the highest she’s seen in three decades. There are an estimated 10,000 foreign nurses with U.S. job offers on waiting lists for interviews at American embassies around the world for the required visas.

Since the middle of 2020, the number of international nurses registering to practice in the United Kingdom has swelled, “pointing toward this year being the highest in the last 30 years in terms of numbers,” said James Buchan, a senior fellow with the Health Foundation, a British charity, who advises the World Health Organization and national governments on health worker mobility.

“There are 15 nurses in my unit and half have an application in process to work abroad,” said Mike Noveda, a senior neonatal nurse in the Philippines who has been temporarily reassigned to run Covid wards in a major hospital in Manila. “In six months, they will have left.”

As the pandemic enters its third year and infections from the Omicron variant surge around the world, the shortage of health workers is a growing concern just about everywhere. As many as 180,000 have died of Covid, [according to the W.H.O.](#) Others have burned out or quit in frustration over factors such as a lack of personal protective equipment. About 20 percent in the United States have left their jobs during the pandemic. The W.H.O. has recorded strikes and other labor action by health workers in more than 80 countries in the past year — the amount that would normally be seen in a decade. In both developing countries and wealthy ones, the depletion of the health work force has come at a cost to patient care.

European and North American countries have created dedicated immigration fast-tracks for health care workers, and have expedited processes to recognize foreign qualifications.

The British government introduced a “[health and care visa](#)” program in 2020, which targets and fast tracks foreign health care workers to fill staffing vacancies. The program includes benefits such as reduced visa costs and quicker processing.

Canada has eased language requirements for residency and has expedited the process of recognizing the qualifications of foreign-trained nurses. Japan is offering a pathway to residency for temporary aged-care workers. Germany is allowing foreign-trained doctors to move directly into assistant physician positions.

In 2010, the member states of the W.H.O. adopted a Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, driven in part by an exodus of nurses and doctors from nations in sub-Saharan Africa ravaged by AIDS. African governments expressed frustration that their universities were producing doctors and nurses educated with public funds who were being lured away to the United States and Britain as soon as they were fully trained, for salaries their home countries could never hope to match.

The code recognizes the right of individuals to migrate but calls for wealthy nations to recruit through bilateral agreements, with the involvement of the health ministry in the country of origin.

In exchange for an organized recruitment of health workers, the destination country should supply support for health care initiatives designated by the source country. Destination countries are also supposed to offer “learn and return” in which health workers with new skills return home after a period of time.

But Mr. Catton, of the international nurses organization, said that was not the current pattern. “For nurses who are recruited, there is no intention for them to go back, often quite the opposite: They want to establish themselves in another country and bring their families to join them,” he said.

Zambia has an excess of nurses, on paper — thousands of graduates of nursing schools are unemployed, although a new government has pledged to hire 11,200 health workers this year. But it is veteran nurses such as Lillian Mwape, the director of nursing at the hospital where Mr. Mulumba works, who are most sought by recruiters.

“People are leaving constantly,” said Ms. Mwape, whose inbox is flooded with emails from recruiters letting her know how quickly she can get a visa to the United States.

The net effect, she said, “is that we are handicapped.”

“It is the most-skilled nurses that we lose and you can’t replace them,” Ms. Mwape said. “Now in the I.C.U. we might have four or five trained critical-care nurses, where we should have 20. The rest are general nurses, and they can’t handle the burden of Covid.”

Dr. Brian Sampa, a general practitioner in Lusaka, recently began the language testing that is the first step to emigrate to the United Kingdom. He is the head of a doctor’s union and vividly aware of how valuable physicians are in Zambia. There are fewer than 2,000 doctors working in the public sector — on which the vast majority of people are reliant — and 5,000 doctors in the entire country, he said. That works out to one doctor per 12,000 people; the W.H.O. recommends a minimum of one per 1,000.

Twenty Zambian doctors have died of Covid. In Dr. Sampa’s last job, he was the sole doctor in a district with 80,000 people, and he often spent close to 24 hours at a time in the operating theater doing emergency surgeries, he said.

The pandemic has left him dispirited about Zambia’s health system. He described days treating critically ill Covid patients when he searched a whole hospital to find only a single C-clamp needed to run oxygenation equipment. He earns slightly less than \$1000 a month.

“Obviously, there are more pros to leaving than staying,” Dr. Sampa said. “So for those of us who are staying, it is just because there are things holding us, but not because we are comfortable where we are.”

The migration of health care workers — often from low-income nations to high-income ones — was growing well before the pandemic; it had increased 60 percent in the decade to 2016, said Dr. Giorgio Cometto, an expert on health work force issues who works with the W.H.O.

The Philippines and India have deliberately overproduced nurses for years with the intention of sending them abroad to earn and send remittances; nurses from these two countries make up almost the entire work force of some Persian Gulf States. But now the Philippines is reporting shortages domestically. Mr. Noveda, the nurse in Manila, said his colleagues, exhausted by pandemic demands that have required frequent 24-hour shifts, were applying to leave in record numbers.

Yet movement across borders has been more complicated during the pandemic, and immigration processes have slowed significantly, leaving many workers, and prospective employers, in limbo.

While some countries are sincere about bilateral agreements, that isn’t the only level at which recruitment happens. “What we hear time and time again is that recruitment agencies pitch up in-country and talk directly to the nurses offering very attractive packages,” Mr. Catton said.

The United Kingdom has a “red list” of countries with fragile health systems from which it won’t recruit for its National Health Service. But some health workers get around that by entering Britain first with a

	<p>placement through an agency that staffs private nursing homes, for example. Then, once they are established in Britain, they move over to the N.H.S., which pays better.</p> <p>Michael Clemens, an expert on international migration from developing countries at the Center for Global Development in Washington, said the growing alarm about outflows of health workers from developing countries risks ignoring the rights of individuals.</p> <p>“Offering someone a life-changing career opportunity for themselves, something that can make a huge difference to their kids, is not an ethical crime,” he said. “It is an action with complex consequences.”</p> <p>The United Kingdom went into the pandemic with one in 10 nurse jobs vacant. Mr. Catton said some countries are making overseas recruitment a core part of their staffing strategies, and not just using it as a pandemic stopgap. If that’s the plan, he said, then recruiting countries must more assiduously monitor the impact on the source country and calculate the cost being borne by the country that trains those nurses.</p> <p>Alex Mulumba, the Zambian operating room nurse, says that if he goes to Canada, he won’t stay permanently, just five or six years to save up some money. He won’t bring his family with him, because he wants to keep his ties to home.</p> <p>“This is my country, and I have to try to do something about it,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 CIA-backed Afghan fighters wait reach US
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/us/politics/cia-afghan-fighters-commandos.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — During the frantic evacuation from Afghanistan in August, the American troops securing the Kabul airport against suicide bombers and other dangers were not alone. At the direction of the C.I.A., agency-trained Afghan counterterrorism squads helped patrol the perimeter, secure the gates and get American citizens through them.</p> <p>Those Afghan commandos stayed to the end, and were among the very last allies to be evacuated. But even as some 80,000 other Afghan refugees quickly reached the United States, hundreds of the C.I.A.-backed fighters and their families are among thousands who remained stuck at a sprawling refugee compound in the Emirati desert.</p> <p>As weeks have turned into months, some members of the C.I.A.-backed squads — which at times over the past two decades were accused of killing civilians and other wartime abuses — say they feel abandoned, victims of a chaotic withdrawal in which the speed with which departing Afghans reached the United States was often determined by nothing more than what kind of plane they left on.</p> <p>Biden administration officials say they are on track to eventually come to the United States.</p> <p>But the plight of the commandos underscores the issues continuing to plague the extensive evacuation, vetting and resettlement efforts five months after the abrupt Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August.</p> <p>At the most basic level, all of the Afghans who helped the NATO forces during the 20-year Afghanistan war and are now in Abu Dhabi are fortunate: They got out with their families and are safe. Since August, there have been a slew of nonjudicial killings carried out against former government security force members who remained in Afghanistan.</p> <p>But interviews with half a dozen officials involved in the effort and people familiar with the accounts provided by some of the commandos help illustrate the major differences in how Afghans who got out are being treated based on which planes they boarded at the Kabul airport.</p> <p>Afghans who got onto American military planes are the more fortunate: They were taken to bases where deals with host countries allowed them to stay for only a few weeks. After they were vetted at such</p>

temporary transit locations, the Homeland Security Department invoked a rarely used “humanitarian parole” power to swiftly move them to the United States.

As a result, nearly all of those roughly 80,000 Afghans have now already been able to reach the United States. Most of them have been resettled and are starting new lives — even though their applications for permanent status with a Special Immigrant Visa, or S.I.V., are still being processed.

By contrast, those Afghans who boarded non-American evacuation flights, such as charters operated by the United Arab Emirates, were taken to facilities in host countries where they can stay indefinitely, including the U.A.E.-run compound known as Emirates Humanitarian City. A significant portion of its roughly 9,000 refugee residents are C.I.A.-trained fighters and their families, according to people familiar with the matter.

A vast majority of thousands of C.I.A.-trained fighters and their families have already been relocated to the United States, American officials said. But that has made the waiting for the hundreds in United Arab Emirates all the more painful, according to the former Afghan commandos.

Because those Afghans in places like Humanitarian City are safe, the United States is processing them through regular bureaucratic order, officials said. As a result, they are being required to wait there until their S.I.V. applications are completed — which can take many months. Requirements for vaccinations and medical tests can further slow the process.

Biden administration officials were reluctant to talk about or acknowledge the C.I.A.-backed squads specifically. But they insisted that all the evacuees in Humanitarian City and other countries would be treated fairly.

“We’re working to develop a standardized process that ensures we make good on our commitments to our Afghan allies,” Emily Horne, a National Security Council spokeswoman, said in a statement. “We cannot underestimate the anxiety that they and their families must feel. Those of us working on this want to alleviate that anxiety as best we can and make good on our country’s pledge to them.”

One official said that about 500 S.I.V. applicants a week reach a stage in the process where the State Department places them in a queue for eventual transfer to the United States, and that about a quarter of the population of refugees in Humanitarian City is now at that stage.

But that official also said even for that group, it was likely to be several more months at best before those applicants would complete other steps in the visa process. Another official said it was likely to be another five months before the C.I.A. fighters and their families were able to come to the United States.

The fighters are unlike most other refugees in a number of respects, not least the key role they played in working with the C.I.A. on the counterinsurgency and counterterrorism campaigns, in which they were often sent to kill or capture high-profile targets such as those in the Taliban’s violent Haqqani network and Al Qaeda.

Their American trainers saw them as efficient and reliable at fighting the Taliban. But many Afghan civilians accused them of their own acts of terror: violently raiding rural villages, indiscriminately killing civilians and abusing prisoners.

In 2019, a report by Human Rights Watch accused the C.I.A.-trained counterterrorism forces of killing civilians during night raids meant to strike at terrorist cells. The report detailed 14 cases where C.I.A.-trained units committed “serious abuses” between 2017 and 2019.

Tammy K. Thorp, the chief spokeswoman for the C.I.A., said the United States takes accusations of human rights abuses seriously, but the allegations against the agency’s partners in Afghanistan were simply not true. “A false narrative exists about these forces that has persisted over the years due to a systematic propaganda campaign by the Taliban,” she said.

Multiple senior American officials said that the counterterrorism fighters were not being evaluated with greater caution because of the type of role they played in the war, and that they were on track to receive S.I.V. status. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the nature of the work done by the Afghans in conjunction with the C.I.A.

And after The New York Times began asking questions about the group, American officials have tried to reassure them that they will get visas to enter the United States in the next three to six months, according to people briefed on the conversations.

That two-tiered system in which some Afghans must complete their visa process before entering, another official said, reflects the scale of the challenge: American programs that resettle refugees are already overwhelmed, having been cut back in the Trump years and then being faced with the huge influx of Afghans. There are still about 12,000 Afghans at domestic military bases awaiting matching with resettlement agencies that will move them to a city and help them get started, officials said.

There are also smaller groups of Afghan refugees still hoping to come to the United States scattered about elsewhere, including about 250 at a transit zone in Qatar. And there are about 200 at a NATO base in Kosovo, comprising several dozen men who were weeded out in the initial vetting of those otherwise eligible for humanitarian parole and so are undergoing additional screening, along with relatives staying with them.

But even as American officials counsel patience, those who find themselves still waiting in the desert outside Abu Dhabi are growing frustrated. Those feelings appear particularly sharp among the counterterrorism units, who say they served the United States at significant personal risk to the end — even as other units surrendered to the Taliban or melted into the countryside.

“These guys should get credit for doing what they did for 20 years — fight our common enemy, Al Qaeda and the Taliban,” said Mick Mulroy, a retired C.I.A. paramilitary officer and Afghanistan veteran.

Mr. Mulroy said he was not criticizing the Emirates, and praised the U.A.E. for taking in the Afghan refugees. But he said the United States, within procedures, should speed their passage to America.

In conversations with Americans, the fighters have described conditions in Humanitarian City as strained and increasingly unpleasant, adding to their sense of being forgotten.

The facility is essentially a collection of makeshift hotels designed for short-term stays. It was established in 2003, initially to be a hub to help aid workers traveling to disaster areas. Last August, the Emirates agreed to host 5,000 evacuees at Humanitarian City, though far more are there now.

While food is plentiful, people familiar with the daily lives of residents said it had been a source of recurring complaints among the refugees.

In particular, one of the people described the food as cooked and spiced in an Indian style, saying the Afghan evacuees find it unpalatable. It is also sometimes spoiled: The person provided The Times with pictures and videos showing moldy eggs, spoiled meat, rice served with shreds of paper mixed in and rotting potatoes. The person said some children had food poisoning this month, forcing a temporary halt in meal service.

Lines to see a doctor to obtain vaccinations required for admission to the United States or other medical care are hours long, the people familiar with residents' complaints said, and the medicines are often out of stock when they seek to fill their prescriptions. Most of the medical personnel are Indian or Ugandan, requiring translators.

In a statement, the Emirati Embassy in Washington said it had assisted in the evacuation of more than 40,000 people from Afghanistan. The Emirates has provided food and health services along with schooling

	<p>and recreational activities in the air-conditioned facilities of Humanitarian City, the embassy said. The facilities in Humanitarian City were designed to house people only temporarily, the embassy said, and the United States is leading the effort to transfer evacuees.</p> <p>A senior administration official said conditions in Humanitarian City were as good as or better than those of refugees still at American military bases, which have also been strained because they were not designed to house large numbers of refugees for a long time.</p> <p>But Afghans in the Emirates said they would rather be in the United States while going through the visa process so they can begin their search for work and a new life immediately. And the longer they wait, the more the Afghans worry they may not make it to the United States.</p> <p>Former C.I.A. officers who worked with them said their efforts on behalf of America should be recognized.</p> <p>“These guys have literally been fighting every night for 20 years,” Mr. Mulroy said. “They are really skilled. They have proven themselves.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 OSHA cancels business vaccine mandate
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/25/osha-cancels-business-vaccine-mandate-after-suprem/
GIST	<p>The Occupational Safety and Health Administration announced Tuesday that it was canceling its emergency policy mandating large businesses require employees to be vaccinated or face masking and testing, after the Supreme Court put the policy on ice this month.</p> <p>In its notice announcing the retreat, OSHA said the court’s ruling dealt a death blow to the mandate, which was issued as an emergency temporary standard, or ETS.</p> <p>“Notwithstanding the withdrawal of the Vaccination and Testing ETS, OSHA continues to strongly encourage the vaccination of workers against the continuing dangers posed by COVID-19 in the workplace,” the agency said.</p> <p>The business mandate, which applied to companies with at least 100 employees, was the broadest of President Biden’s mandates, covering more than 90 million private-sector workers.</p> <p>The Biden administration has issued three other mandates covering federal workers, federal contractors and medical workers who are funded by federal programs. The federal worker and federal contractor mandates have both been put on hold by lower courts, while the Supreme Court allowed the medical worker mandate to remain in place.</p> <p>But it was the business mandate that was supposed to do the heavy lifting in Mr. Biden’s strategy to prod vaccine resisters to get the shots.</p> <p>The Supreme Court, in a 6-3 ruling, said that while vaccine mandates on workers are legal, Congress must give that authority to the administration. There is no evidence that Congress wanted OSHA to be able to do it on its own, the majority ruled.</p> <p>The decision didn’t technically rule the OSHA policy illegal, but rather prevented it from going into effect while lower courts heard more arguments.</p> <p>OSHA’s decision Tuesday should bring those cases to a close.</p> <p>The White House has brushed off the legal losses, suggesting that the president’s goal of prodding Americans to get shots already has largely succeeded.</p>

	<p>White House press secretary Jen Psaki last week said 96% of federal workers had taken steps to comply with their mandate by the time a federal judge halted it.</p> <p>OSHA, in its filing Tuesday, said it isn't entirely giving up the fight for a mandate on businesses.</p> <p>While it has scrapped the emergency standard, it still will go through with the usual rule making process, OSHA said.</p> <p>Rep. Virginia Foxx, the top Republican on the House Education and Labor Committee, urged OSHA to cancel that effort, too.</p> <p>"We should allow our business owners and workers to get our economy back on track — not force them to carry out the will of Washington bureaucrats," the North Carolina lawmaker said.</p> <p>OSHA's policy would require businesses to enforce a vaccine mandate or impose mandatory masking and weekly testing for employees.</p> <p>Businesses said it would be a massive financial burden and could chase millions of people from the workforce.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Covid booster drive losing steam
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/25/covid-19-booster-drive-is-faltering-in-the-us/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK — The COVID-19 booster drive in the U.S. is losing steam, worrying health experts who have pleaded with Americans to get an extra shot to shore up their protection against the highly contagious omicron variant.</p> <p>Just 40% of fully vaccinated Americans have received a booster dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And the average number of booster shots dispensed per day in the U.S. has plummeted from a peak of 1 million in early December to about 490,000 as of last week.</p> <p>Also, a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that Americans are more likely to see the initial vaccinations - rather than a booster - as essential.</p> <p>"It's clear that the booster effort is falling short," said Jason Schwartz, a vaccine policy expert at Yale University.</p> <p>Overall, the U.S. vaccination campaign has been sluggish. More than 13 months after it began, just 63% of Americans, or 210 million people, are fully vaccinated with the initial rounds of shots. Mandates that could raise those numbers have been hobbled by legal challenges.</p> <p>Vaccination numbers are stagnant in states such as Wyoming, Idaho, Mississippi and Alabama, which have been hovering below 50%.</p> <p>The U.S. and many other nations have been urging adults to get boosters because the vaccine's protection can wane. Also, research has shown that while the vaccines have proved less effective against omicron, boosters can rev up the body's defenses against the threat.</p> <p>As for why an estimated 86 million Americans who have been fully vaccinated and are eligible for a booster have not yet gotten one, Schwartz said public confusion is one important reason.</p> <p>"I think the evidence is now overwhelming that the booster is not simply an optional supplement, but it is a foundational part of protection," he said. "But clearly that message has been lost."</p> <p>The need for all Americans to get boosters initially was debated by scientists, and at first the government recommended only that certain groups of people, such as senior citizens, get additional</p>

doses. The arrival of omicron, and additional evidence about falling immunity, showed more clearly a widespread need for boosters.

But the message “has been lost in the sea of changing recommendations and guidance,” Schwartz said.

The AP-NORC Center poll found that 59% of Americans think it is essential that receive a vaccine to fully participate in public life without feeling at risk of COVID-19 infection. Only 47% say the same about a booster shot.

Keller Anne Ruble, 32, of Denver, received her two doses of the Moderna vaccine but hasn’t gotten her booster. She said she had a bad reaction to the second dose and was in bed for four days with a fever and flu-like symptoms.

“I believe in the power of vaccines, and I know that’s going to protect me,” said Ruble, the owner of a greeting card sending service. But the vaccine “just knocked me out completely and freaked me out about getting the booster.”

She said she does plan to get the booster in the next few weeks and in the meantime wears an N95 mask and tries to stay home.

“I just don’t want to get COVID in general,” she said. “It does scare me.”

Blake Hassler, 26, of Nashville, Tennessee, said he doesn’t plan to get the booster. He received Pfizer’s two doses last year after having a mild case of COVID-19 in 2020. He said he considers himself to be in a low-risk category.

“At this point, we need to focus on prevention of serious illness at the onset of symptoms rather than creating a new shot every six weeks and more divisive mandates,” he said.

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HEADLINE	01/25 US eyes personal sanctions on Putin
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/26/biden-threatens-putin-with-personal-sanctions-if-russia-invades-ukraine
GIST	<p>Joe Biden has said he will consider personal sanctions against Vladimir Putin if Russia invades Ukraine, as western leaders step up military preparations and make plans to shield Europe from Russian gas being cut off.</p> <p>The rare sanctions threat came as Nato placed forces on standby and reinforced eastern Europe with more ships and fighter jets in response to Russia’s troop buildup near its border with Ukraine.</p> <p>If Russia attacked, Biden said, it would be the “largest invasion since world war two” and would “change the world”. The president said he would consider adding direct sanctions on Putin to a raft of measures being drawn up.</p> <p>“Yes. I would see that,” Biden said when asked by reporters in Washington about targeting Putin, whom opponents have long accused of holding gigantic secret wealth.</p> <p>A senior US official laid out economic sanctions “with massive consequences” going far beyond previous measures implemented in 2014 after Russia invaded Ukraine’s Crimea region.</p> <p>Russia denies planning an attack and says the crisis is being driven by Nato and US actions. It is demanding security guarantees from the west including a promise by Nato never to admit Ukraine as a member. Moscow sees the former Soviet republic as a buffer between Russia and Nato countries.</p>

Efforts to resolve the tensions diplomatically have continued, with officials from France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine expected to meet in Paris on Wednesday.

The threat of sanctions on Putin came as the US helped prepare for the diversion of natural gas supplies from around the world to Europe in the event that the flow from Russia is cut, in an effort to blunt Putin's most powerful economic weapon.

US officials said on Tuesday that they had been negotiating with global suppliers and were confident that Europe would not suffer from a sudden loss of energy for heating in the middle of winter.

"To ensure Europe is able to make it through the winter and spring we expect to be prepared to ensure alternative supplies covering a significant majority of the potential shortfall," a senior official said.

The preparation for bulk gas deliveries is part of a campaign by the US and its European allies to show a united and coherent front to Putin. Boris Johnson hinted that Germany was concerned about the imposition of sanctions against Russia because of its dependence on Russian gas and told MPs diplomatic efforts were being made to persuade Berlin and others to go further.

The British prime minister said that "European friends" had concerns about imposing the toughest possible sanctions on Moscow because of their "heavy dependence" on Russian gas – and also declared the UK would be willing to deploy more troops to eastern Europe if Ukraine was attacked.

His comments came as the French president, Emmanuel Macron, and Olaf Scholz, the new German chancellor, met in Berlin on Tuesday to coordinate their stances after reports of rifts among the allies.

Macron said he was due to speak by phone with Putin on Friday to "clarify" the Russian position. He said France and Germany would never abandon dialogue with Russia, but added: "If there is aggression, there will be retaliation and the cost will be very high."

The Russian military announced it would carry out a new set of military exercises involving 6,000 troops near the Ukrainian border, and within Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula that Moscow annexed in 2014. The drills would include exercises with live ammunition and feature fighter jets, bombers, anti-aircraft systems and vessels from Russia's Black Sea and Caspian fleets, the defence ministry said.

Ukrainian leaders called for calm, with the defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, telling parliament that an invasion was not imminent. He said the Russians had yet to form a combat battle group of the sort it would need, and "as of today, there are no grounds to believe" Russia would invade imminently.

"Don't worry, sleep well," he said. "No need to have your bags packed."

Russia has already restricted the flow of natural gas through the pipeline running through Ukraine from about 100m cubic metres a day to 50m, US officials have said. Washington estimates that almost all of that can be replaced quickly if the pipeline is cut deliberately or as a result of conflict. If gas were to be diverted to Europe it would largely have to be in the form of liquified natural gas (LNG), but at present the entire global market in LNG would not be sufficient to make up the shortfall.

The US also said it was preparing restrictions on exports to Russia of hi-tech software and hardware made by the US and its allies. Officials said the measures would affect Russian ambitions in the fields of aerospace, defence, lasers and sensitive maritime technology, artificial intelligence and quantum computers.

"When we pick these sectors, it's quite deliberate," an official said. "These are sectors that Putin himself has championed, as the way forward for Russia to diversify its economy beyond oil and gas. And so that would lead to an atrophy of Russia's productive capacity over time."

	<p>Meanwhile the flow of arms to Ukraine accelerated. US officials confirmed that a plane carrying hundreds of anti-tank Javelin missiles had arrived in Kyiv and a shipment of more was ready to go from Estonia.</p> <p>“On the Javelins, this is decided and we have the endorsement from the US, so it’s just a matter of time when we’re going to send them out,” an Estonian official said, adding they would be sent “as soon as possible”.</p> <p>The Estonian government also intended to sent howitzer guns to Ukraine but was waiting on approval from Germany, where the guns originated, and from Finland, which supplied some of the guns to Estonia.</p> <p>Latvia and Lithuania are supplying Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine. The UK has sent 2,000 anti-tank missiles and Saxon armoured cars, and Turkey has supplied Bayraktar drones.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Germans protest against Covid restrictions
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/25/peace-freedom-no-dictatorship-germans-protest-against-covid-restrictions
GIST	<p>On Monday evening on the dot of 7pm people emerged from dimly lit side streets and gathered on the Oberkirchplatz square in Cottbus for what has become a weekly ritual in towns and cities across Germany: a protest against coronavirus protection measures.</p> <p>The demonstrations have grown in strength as cases of the Omicron variant have surged, and in recent weeks a looming decision on bringing in a vaccine mandate has become the focus of protesters’ ire. More than 2,000 rallies were held nationwide on Monday, drawing tens of thousands of participants.</p> <p>In Cottbus, a university city south-east of Berlin, a familiar pattern played out. Moments after the protest started, police declared over megaphone that it was illegal – the participants did not wear masks or physically distance from each other. Groups then broke away and began the Spaziergänge, walks that snake in a variety of directions and are designed to overwhelm any police response.</p> <p>Dressed in padded coats and woolly hats, the protesters were an inconspicuous crowd. “We are just having an evening stroll,” one woman smirked amiably from under a red woollen beret. “Exercising our right to stretch our legs.”</p> <p>The gentle click of heels and umbrella studs on wet cobbled stones was quickly drowned out, however, by a man who bellowed “Frieden, Freiheit, keine Diktatur!” (Peace, freedom, no dictatorship) then “Widerstand!” (Resistance).</p> <p>A woman nearby took up the cry with “Wir sind das Volk!” (We are the people) – the chant that echoed around cities across communist east Germany in 1989 before the fall of the Berlin Wall.</p> <p>Those willing to talk mostly said they wanted to show local and national politicians they had had enough of restrictions. Several said they were not vaccinated; some refused to say. Hardly any were willing to reveal their names.</p> <p>“I just want my freedom back,” said one elderly woman. Another younger woman said she was trying to stop the government from forcibly vaccinating her nine-year-old, though there is currently no plan to oblige parents to have children vaccinated. A physiotherapist, one of the few protesters who was wearing a mask, said she was fearful of losing her job if she refuses to get vaccinated under plans for a mandate for medical staff, due to be introduced next month.</p> <p>Asked why there was need for resistance, Maik, a landscape gardener who refused to wear a mask – calling them “chin nappies” – said: “When injustice becomes law, resistance is our duty.”</p>

There is growing evidence that the protests are being manipulated behind the scenes by rightwing populists and far-right groups, who see issues such as restrictions on gatherings, insistence on the wearing of medical masks as well as a possible vaccine mandate for adults as topics ripe for political exploitation.

Zukunft Heimat (Future Homeland), a far-right group founded in 2015 at the height of the refugee crisis that spreads a nationalist, anti-refugee message, coordinates much of the activity around demonstrations in the state of Brandenburg, including Cottbus.

Ahead of Monday's rallies, it posted a message from one of its co-founders, Christoph Berndt, a dentist who is also the parliamentary leader of the far-right populist AfD in Brandenburg and has been a speaker at anti-refugee Pegida rallies. He called on people to "defend our freedom and our democracy ..." against a government which is "treating its citizens with disdain".

Berndt has previously questioned whether anyone has died of Covid, said he does not believe the virus exists, and refused to wear a mask because it is a "symbol of suppression".

On chat rooms and in conversations on messaging apps about the rallies, people talk about wanting to topple the government, comparing the administration to a dictatorship. Those who once rallied against the former chancellor, Angela Merkel, over her refugee policy now rail against her successor, Olaf Scholz, and his health minister, Karl Lauterbach.

Some refer, online and in person – with what generally appears as glee – to a conspiracy theory called Tag X (Day X) that predicts Germany's "entire system" will collapse due to critical infrastructure being disabled by quarantine measures.

Rally participants are encouraged to "put sand into the cogs of a system" already perceived to be on its last legs, and lighthearted references are made to a "civil war mood".

At the time of the refugee crisis, rightwing extremists linked to the far-right Identitarian movement, the rightwing-focused advertising agency One Per Cent and the thinktank Institut für Staatspolitik (IfS) built a digital map, showing the location of anti-Islam protests across Germany. People could put in their postcode and find their nearest rally.

A similar map has been produced for the coronavirus "Spaziergang" movement, created by the far-right association Filmkunstkollektiv, whose members and supporters include Identitarians, members of the IfS, and One Per Cent.

Filmkunstkollektiv is also known to have produced film material for the AfD, recently accompanying its youth wing on a "vaccine strike" in Berlin. It also has an association with the far-right Compact magazine, whose latest cover depicts a young man with needles and syringes embedded in his body, under the title "Vaccine dictatorship – being boosted to death".

Much of the wind for the protests has come from neighbouring Austria, where plans for a vaccine mandate and the fightback against it are more inflamed. There, the founder of the Identitarian movement, Martin Sellner, has referred to vaccine passports and fines as "totalitarian instruments".

This mindset was reflected in some of the protesters on Monday night, even those who declared themselves "apolitical".

In a chat group on an instant messaging service that provides a running commentary of the Monday protests, an unvaccinated woman wrote that since she has had to abide by rules that ban those not vaccinated or recovered from many non-essential activities, "it is possible to put oneself in the shoes of Jews who suddenly had their basic rights removed from them during the Third Reich".

Such remarks have been widely condemned. Experts on Germany's constitution have warned that the victimhood narrative expressed by many of the protesters is in danger of being exploited by extremist

	<p>elements. They cite the murder last September of a petrol pump attendant shot by a man after he refused to serve him for not wearing a mask as proof that they are not exaggerating.</p> <p>Less than an hour into the rally in Cottbus on Monday night, the several hundred peaceful protesters were playing a game of cat and mouse with the police, who managed to kettle in one group next to a Glühwein kiosk.</p> <p>There were some wild theories doing the rounds. A primary school teacher called Brigitte, walking with a group of friends towards the old market square, said she gave credence to a theory that the vaccine campaign is “an attempt to thin out the world’s population”. The 73% of Germans who are vaccinated are supposed to die, she said. “If this is the case, then I am one of the 26% who will live to make this nation great again.” Asked what the source for the theory was, she replied she “read it on one of my newsfeeds”.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 China cautious approach to climate change
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/26/xi-jinping-warns-chinas-low-carbon-ambitions-must-not-interfere-with-normal-life
GIST	<p>China’s ambitious low-carbon goals should not come at the expense of energy and food security or the “normal life” of ordinary people, president Xi Jinping said, signalling a more cautious approach to climate change as the economy slows.</p> <p>China, the world’s biggest source of climate-warming greenhouse gas emissions, has been under pressure to “enhance ambition” and take more drastic action to tackle global warming.</p> <p>But amid mounting economic challenges, China is worried about the risk to jobs and growth, especially as it prepares to hold a key Communist party conclave that is expected to extend Xi’s rule.</p> <p>Xi told senior Communist party leaders in a speech published late on Monday that China needed to “overcome the notion of rapid success” and proceed gradually.</p> <p>“Reducing emissions is not about reducing productivity, and it is not about not emitting at all,” Xi was quoted by state news agency Xinhua as saying.</p> <p>“We must stick to the overall planning and ensure energy security, industrial supply chain security and food security at the same time as cutting carbon emissions,” he said.</p> <p>Since a national economic work meeting held at the end of last year, Chinese policymakers have repeatedly stressed that the country would “prioritise stability” in 2022.</p> <p>The approach has already started to feed into policymaking, with Zhang Bo, chief engineer of the ministry of ecology and environment, telling reporters earlier this week that the country would not impose strict water quality targets on local governments, and would instead encourage them to “consolidate” previous gains.</p> <p>With energy supplies still a major concern after a wave of shortages hit manufacturers last year, Xi also told Party leaders that “the gradual withdrawal of traditional energy must be based on the safe and reliable replacement by new energy.”</p> <p>China has promised to accelerate the shift to renewables, but will only start to reduce coal consumption - a major source of CO2 - after 2025.</p> <p>China’s state planning agency also said in December that it will loosen blanket restrictions on energy consumption in order to ensure environmental targets do not erode growth.</p>

	<p>In November at the Cop26 summit, China and the US announced a surprise plan to work together on cutting greenhouse gas emissions in the crucial next decade.</p> <p>The world's two biggest emitters unveiled a joint declaration that would see them cooperate closely on the emissions cuts scientists say are needed in the next 10 years to stay within 1.5C.</p> <p>China and the US said they would work together on some key specific areas, such as cutting methane – a powerful greenhouse gas – and emissions from transport, energy and industry.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Covid daily deaths highest in nearly a year
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-deaths-top-2-100-a-day-highest-in-nearly-a-year-11643135898?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>Covid-19 deaths in the U.S. have reached the highest level since early last year, eclipsing daily averages from the recent Delta-fueled surge, after the newer Omicron variant spread wildly through the country and caused record-shattering case counts.</p> <p>The seven-day average for newly reported Covid-19 deaths reached 2,191 a day by Monday, up about 1,000 from daily death counts two months ago, before Omicron was first detected, data from Johns Hopkins University show.</p> <p>While emerging evidence shows Omicron is less likely to kill the people it infects, because the variant spreads with unmatched speed the avalanche of cases can overwhelm any mitigating factors, epidemiologists say.</p> <p>“You can have a disease that is for any particular person less deadly than another, like Omicron, but if it is more infectious and reaches more people, then you’re more likely to have a lot of deaths,” said Robert Anderson, chief of the mortality-statistics branch at the National Center for Health Statistics, which is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The U.S. saw the highest numbers of deaths in the pandemic about a year ago, before vaccines were widely available, when the daily average reached 3,400. More recently, the Delta variant triggered a peak just above 2,100 in late September. Omicron has since muscled Delta aside and now accounts for nearly every known Covid-19 case, the CDC has estimated. The seven-day death average last topped the current level in February 2021, as the U.S. recovered from last winter’s surge.</p> <p>Covid-19 deaths, though still largely composed of older Americans, trended younger as the Delta variant tore through southern states this summer and then older again as it moved northward, recent death-certificate data show. It will take more time for these data to reflect demographic trends during the Omicron surge, Mr. Anderson said.</p> <p>The new variant’s breakneck speed and its arrival during the winter holidays, when states slowed their data reporting, complicated efforts to closely track the impact and so have changes in the way the U.S. detects and counts infections.</p> <p>A surge in at-home testing, for example, is largely not counted in state case reports, said Beth Blauer, the data lead for the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, which compiles pandemic data. This means the huge number of Omicron cases reported—the seven-day average topped 800,000 this month, more than triple the prior record from a year ago—is still likely undercounting the true number by a huge margin, Ms. Blauer said.</p> <p>“I don’t think we have any appreciation for the volume of cases,” she said. The case average, recently trending lower but up early this week, was about 731,600 on Monday.</p>

The case-tracking problem makes it difficult to determine the mortality rate from Omicron compared with prior variants, although there is growing evidence of Omicron being less virulent than its predecessors.

A new study the CDC released on Tuesday measured a high of nine deaths per 1,000 cases during the Omicron surge, weighing deaths against cases from three weeks earlier. During last winter's surge, this number peaked at 16 deaths in 1,000 cases, and during the Delta surge, it reached 13 in 1,000, the study said.

There are [several possible limitations in the analysis](#), including changes in testing and case tracking, a period when Delta and Omicron overlapped and the fact that vaccine coverage wasn't taken into account, the study said.

"We're still losing too many people a day for it to be in any way acceptable," said Jodie Guest, vice chair of the epidemiology department at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health.

CDC data tracking rates of death by vaccination status have yet to catch up to the Omicron surge. Though Omicron is triggering many breakthrough cases in the inoculated, data have shown that infection rates remain higher among the unvaccinated and that those without shots [are significantly more likely to be hospitalized](#).

In a positive sign, Covid-19 related [hospitalizations are heading lower](#) shortly after reaching the highest-recorded levels. Federal data also indicate Covid-19 deaths in hospitals have started to decline from a recent Omicron peak. The CDC says roughly seven of every 10 Covid-19 deaths occur in hospitals or other inpatient settings.

Some parts of the country, including major coastal states like New York and California, are also in recovery mode. A Wall Street Journal analysis shows 20 states representing 55% of the population have case averages down at least 20% from recent peaks.

At the same time, as Omicron fades in populous, coastal areas, it hasn't yet peaked in less-vaccinated regions that could see a higher death rate, Mr. Anderson said. Deaths may climb yet further as they continue tracking the recent rise in cases, epidemiologists said.

"We know that deaths are a lagging indicator," said Andrew Noymer, an infectious-disease epidemiologist and demographer at the University of California, Irvine. "I'd want to give it a few more weeks before I take any victory laps, claiming that we've been fortunate on the deaths side."

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HEADLINE	01/25 Germany waivers in Ukraine standoff
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/world/europe/germany-russia-nato-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>BERLIN — The United States and its NATO allies are moving to bulk up their military commitments in the Baltics and Eastern Europe as the standoff with Russia over Ukraine deepens.</p> <p>Denmark is sending fighter jets to Lithuania and a frigate to the Baltic Sea. France has offered to send troops to Romania. Spain is sending a frigate to the Black Sea. President Biden has put thousands of U.S. troops on "high alert."</p> <p>And then there is Germany. In recent days Germany — Europe's largest and richest democracy, strategically situated at the crossroads between East and West — has stood out more for what it will not do than for what it is doing.</p> <p>No European country matters more to European unity and the Western alliance. But as Germany struggles to overcome its post-World War II reluctance to lead on security matters in Europe and set aside its instinct to accommodate rather than confront Russia, Europe's most pivotal country has waffled in the first crucial test for the new government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz.</p>

Germany's evident hesitation to take forceful measures has fueled doubts about its reliability as an ally — reversing the dynamic with the United States in recent years — and added to concerns that Moscow could use German wavering as a wedge to divide a united European response to any Russian aggression.

President Biden held a video call with European leaders on Monday night, saying it went “very, very, very” well, and beforehand Chancellor Scholz reiterated that Russia would suffer “high costs” in case of a military intervention. But Germany's allies have still been left to wonder what cost it is prepared to bear to confront possible Russian aggression.

“Within the European Union Germany is crucial to achieve unity,” said Norbert Röttgen, a senior conservative lawmaker and advocate of a more muscular German foreign policy. “Putin's goal is to split the Europeans, and then split Europe and the U.S. If the impression prevails that Germany is not fully committed to a strong NATO response, he will have succeeded in paralyzing Europe and dividing the alliance.”

As Russia held military drills near the Ukrainian border on Tuesday, Mr. Scholz met with President Emmanuel Macron of France in Berlin, warning Moscow that “a military aggression calling into question the territorial integrity of Ukraine would have grave consequences.”

But the German government has not only ruled out any arms exports to Ukraine — it is also holding up a shipment of nine Communist-era howitzers from Estonia to Ukraine.

Mr. Scholz and other senior Social Democrats in his government and party have been vague about whether shuttering the controversial [Nord Stream 2](#) undersea gas pipeline from Russia to Germany would be part of an arsenal of possible sanctions against Russia, insisting it was a “private -sector project” and one “separate” from Ukraine.

Friedrich Merz, the designated new leader of Angela Merkel's opposition conservative party, meanwhile, has warned against excluding Russian banks from the Swift payment transactions network that handles global financial transfers because it would “harm” Germany's economic interests.

Germany's muddled stance has been especially unsettling to Ukraine and some of Germany's eastern neighbors. The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, accused Berlin of effectively “encouraging” Russian aggression. Other were no less scathing.

“Berlin is making a big strategic mistake and putting its reputation at risk,” Laurynas Kasčiūnas, chairman of the national security committee of the Lithuanian Parliament told the public broadcaster [LRT](#).

Artis Pabriks, Latvia's defense minister, said these days German deterrence was “not sending weapons to Ukraine, but a field hospital.”

The strain in the alliance came to a head last weekend when the chief of the German Navy said that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia deserved “respect” and that Crimea would “never” be returned to Ukraine. Vice Adm. Kay-Achim Schönbach, resigned, but the backlash was swift and emotional.

“This patronizing attitude subconsciously also reminds Ukrainians of the horrors of the Nazi occupation, when Ukrainians were treated as subhuman,” said Andriy Melnyk, Ukraine's ambassador to Germany.

Washington has been at pains to publicly stress its trust in Berlin, while privately lobbying Mr. Scholz to take a harder line.

President Biden sent several emissaries to Berlin. William J. Burns, head of the C.I.A., presented the chancellor with the latest intelligence on Ukraine. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, who stopped in Berlin before meeting his Russian counterpart in Geneva last week, said on Sunday he had “no doubts” over Germany's determination to stand up to Russia.

“It is telling that the U.S. has to publicly reaffirm its trust in Germany,” Jana Puglierin of the Berlin-based European Council on Foreign Relations said. “That used to be a given.”

The wrenching debate over where precisely German loyalties lie is not new. Russian-German relations have been shaped by centuries of trade and cultural exchange but also two World Wars. The Cold War added yet another layer of complexity: West Germany became firmly embedded in the Western alliance while East Germany lived under Soviet occupation.

“Why do we see Russia differently from the Americans? History,” said Matthias Platzeck, chairman of the Russian-German Forum and a former chair of Mr. Scholz’ Social Democrats. “Germany and Russia have been linked for a thousand years. The biggest Russian czarina was Catherine the Great, a German, who incidentally made Crimea part of Russia.”

“We attacked Russia twice, and the second time it was a genocidal war,” he added. “Twenty-seven million Soviets died, 15 million Russians among them.”

That does not mean that Germany has failed to stand up to Russia in recent years. Germany commands a multinational NATO battle unit in Lithuania and helps monitor Baltic airspace for Russian interference. It is planning to send fighter jets to Romania next month to do the same there. (And yes, it is also sending a field hospital to Kyiv next month.)

In 2014, when Mr. Putin invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, it was Ms. Merkel who rallied neighboring countries in East and West to back tough sanctions on Russia.

But the change of German leadership after 16 years of Ms. Merkel has put in place a government that is divided on how hard a line to draw with Russia.

Mr. Scholz’s Social Democrats have traditionally favored a policy of working with the Russians. In the 1970s, Chancellor Willy Brandt engineered the policy of rapprochement with Moscow during the Cold War, while the last Social Democratic chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, is not just a close friend of Mr. Putin (he celebrated his 70th birthday with him) but has been on the payroll of Russian energy companies since 2005.

The new Green Party foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, has been more outspoken on being tougher on Russia. But even she has drawn a line on sending German arms to Ukraine, citing “history.”

The arms-export policy in many ways embodies the modern German paradox of a nation that knows it has to assume more leadership responsibility in the world but is not quite ready to act that way.

“The idea that Germany delivers weapons that could then be used to kill Russians is very difficult to stomach for many Germans,” said Marcel Dirsus, a political analyst and nonresident fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University.

The government has been even more divided over Nord Stream 2, a gas pipeline owned by Gazprom, Russia’s state-owned energy company, that many fear will hand Mr. Putin an easy way to exert influence over America’s European allies.

Russia is Europe’s main supplier of natural gas. Once Nord Stream 2 is operational, Gazprom would be able to sell additional gas to European customers without paying transit fees to Ukraine.

Championed by Ms. Merkel in 2015, a year after Russia first invaded Ukraine, Nord Stream 2 has long inflamed Washington and European capitals alike.

	<p>While Ms. Baerbock, the Green Party foreign minister, has not been shy about expressing her hostility toward the project, Ms. Merkel and Mr. Scholz have defended it on economic and energy security grounds and long ruled out using it as leverage in talks about sanctions.</p> <p>It was only last week, standing next to the NATO general secretary, that the chancellor shifted his language, saying that “everything” would be on the table in case of a Russian invasion.</p> <p>“Putin gave NATO a new reason to exist,” said Mr. Dirsus of the Institute for Security Policy in Kiel. “Who knows, maybe he can teach the Germans once and for all that the world has changed and they need to be prepared to pay to defend peace.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 US to bolster Europe’s fuel supply
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/us/politics/us-europe-fuel-supply-russian-cutoff.html
GIST	<p>The Biden administration announced on Tuesday that it was working with gas and crude oil suppliers from the Middle East, North Africa and Asia to bolster supplies to Europe in the coming weeks, in an effort to blunt the threat that Russia could cut off fuel shipments in the escalating conflict over Ukraine.</p> <p>European allies have been cautious in public about how far they would go in placing severe sanctions on Moscow if it invades Ukraine. Germany has been especially wary; it has shuttered many of its nuclear plants, increasing its dependence on natural gas imports to generate electricity.</p> <p>Many European officials have said they suspect President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia instigated the current crisis in the depths of winter for a reason, calculating that he has more leverage if he can threaten to turn off Russian fuel sales to Europe.</p> <p>So in recent weeks, American officials have been planning an effort that has echoes of the Berlin airlift, the attempt to keep West Berlin supplied in the face of a Soviet blockade in 1948 and 1949. That event led to the creation of NATO, the defensive alliance that Mr. Putin is hoping to undercut by massing troops along the Ukrainian border, and by demanding that NATO pull back from what he has called Russia’s “sphere of influence.”</p> <p>American officials have been scrambling to find additional alternative energy supplies — particularly of natural gas. It is an effort to pre-empt what U.S. officials believe will be one of Mr. Putin’s key strategies: cutting off gas supplies to European markets unless they break with the sanctions that the United States and other allies have threatened if Russia invades Ukraine.</p> <p>The theory is that, once they are reassured about energy supplies, European allies will be far more willing to sever Russian financial institutions from the international banking system, and to join in new export controls that would bar Russian manufacturers from receiving semiconductors and other key parts that are based on American designs.</p> <p>Mr. Putin’s easiest move would be to further cut gas supplies from pipelines that run through Ukraine. In recent months, to pressure the Ukrainian government, Russia has already reduced supplies flowing through Ukraine to Europe by about 50 percent.</p> <p>That is the supply most at risk if a conflict begins. But American officials provided no estimates of how much of that daily flow of gas they believe they can replace through other routes.</p> <p>And clearly by announcing the effort — but not the specific sources of alternative supply — U.S. officials are trying to deter Russia from acting. This is the same strategy that led the United States to reveal that it had evidence that Mr. Putin intended to stage a “false flag” attack that could provide a pretext for invasion, and that led Britain to declare that Russia was seeking to replace the current Ukrainian leadership with a puppet government.</p>

Russia provides about one-third of the gas and crude oil imported by the European Union. Last year, Russia provided about 128 billion cubic meters of gas to Europe, according to industry estimates, and about a third of that flowed through Ukrainian territory.

Russia has reduced that flow this winter, and its effort to open the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, connecting Siberia to Germany, would give it a way to route all of its gas around Ukraine, crippling a key source of revenue for the Ukrainian government while increasing European dependency on Russian supply.

The initiative to get fuel from alternative sources flowing to Europe now, before a true crisis erupts, was described by Biden administration officials as a key element in assuring allies that they will be able to weather any cutoff of supply from Russia. And they argue that Russia's huge dependency on its oil and gas sales — which accounts for more than a third of the country's gross domestic product and much of the government's revenue — creates a vulnerability in Moscow that the Western allies can exploit.

"If Russia decides to weaponize its supply of natural gas or crude oil," a senior administration official told reporters in a call on Tuesday morning, "it wouldn't be without consequences to the Russian economy. Remember, this is a one-dimensional economy, and that means it needs oil and gas revenues at least as much as Europe needs its energy supply."

The official added: "We expect to be prepared to ensure alternative supplies covering a significant majority of the potential shortfall."

The official declined to say which countries were cooperating in the effort to rapidly replace oil and gas from Russia, but some of the sources are obvious, including Saudi Arabia, and existing providers, like Norway. But all of those suppliers face capacity limits, so the U.S. effort appears to be focused on getting incremental increases from a variety of sources.

The official, who declined to be identified under briefing rules set by the administration, said the effort involves boosting "a few cargoes of different suppliers," and could involve sending shipments of liquid natural gas from the United States and other producers.

The market appears to be cooperating — motivated not by geopolitics, but by high prices. In recent weeks an armada of giant cargo ships have been bringing liquefied natural gas, which is gas chilled until it becomes a liquid, to Europe, lured by high prices. Some of the ships have come from the United States, but others have come from Asia. A single tanker can hold the equivalent of three times the current, depressed daily volumes sent from Russia, through Ukraine, and into Europe. Already this month these flows of liquefied natural gas have exceeded the amount of Russian gas coming through Ukraine.

In the briefing, officials declined to say how much of Europe's needs could be met by diverting fuel from other sources. And some of the plans sounded preliminary, in what has turned into something of a contest of psychological warfare between Russia and the West, with the Kremlin warning European nations to stay out of the conflict over Ukraine.

President Biden met with a range of European leaders for 80 minutes on Monday, trying to keep the alliance together as it warns Mr. Putin of "massive consequences" if Russia invades.

At a news conference last week, Mr. Biden talked about the divisions inside Europe on what actions to take against Russia, depending on the actions Moscow takes against Ukraine. After acknowledging at the time that there were differences over how to react to what he termed a "minor incursion," he and other administration officials have since hardened the U.S. stance, warning that any aggressive action over Ukraine's border would bring about a coordinated allied response.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Russia steps up propaganda war
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/us/politics/russia-ukraine-propaganda-disinformation.html

WASHINGTON — As the United States issued warnings last month about the Russian troops on Ukraine's borders and President Biden threatened President Vladimir V. Putin with sanctions if he launched an invasion, researchers noticed an uptick in social media posts accusing Ukraine of plotting a genocide against ethnic Russians.

In one example, an arm of the Moscow-controlled broadcaster RT circulated a clip of Mr. Putin saying that events in eastern Ukraine "resemble genocide." News Front, which the State Department has called a disinformation outlet with ties to Russian security services, followed with an article on Dec. 13 that said the United States did not consider the massacres to be a genocide.

In the months since the Russian troop buildup began, Moscow and its online army of allies have pushed out old arguments about western Ukrainians being aligned with Nazism, falsely accused the United States of using proxy forces to plot a chemical attack and claimed that Russia's planned military operations were intended to protect ethnic Russians or pre-empt action by NATO, according to researchers.

American intelligence officials said Russia had produced a steady stream of disinformation about Ukraine since 2014. But they observed an uptick in December and January as Moscow increased pressure on the government in Kyiv.

The technology firm Logically, a British-based company that helps governments and businesses counter disinformation, has been tracking Russian-aligned social media accounts, such as those of RT and Sputnik, along with Twitter accounts of Russian officials. Posts and articles accusing some Ukrainians of being neo-Nazis have dramatically increased since early November, according to Logically. The Moscow-backed information campaign accusing the United States of planning a chemical attack spiked on Dec. 21, the firm said.

Much of the propaganda is aimed at a domestic audience in Russia and at pro-Moscow Ukrainians, said Brian Murphy, the vice president for strategic operations at Logically. If Russia does invade Ukraine, he said, it wants to make sure it has the support of Russian speakers in the country as its tanks and artillery roll across fields or knock down houses.

"There are very few fence-sitters left in Ukraine," Mr. Murphy said. "They are trying to strengthen support in the separatist-occupied regions of Ukraine and within Russia."

But the propaganda can easily move beyond a Russian-speaking audience.

Intelligence officials have said that while Russia is unlikely to change many minds in Europe, its messaging has had more traction in South America and Africa, muddying the waters about which country is responsible for the Ukraine crisis.

Much like its efforts to divide the American electorate in 2016 by stoking debates about racism, guns and other divisive issues, Russia is trying to increase polarization in Ukraine to give it a tactical advantage, Mr. Murphy said.

The State Department said in a [fact sheet](#) issued last week that much of the disinformation repeated old themes, such as portraying Russia as a victim of U.S. actions, depicting Western societies as on the verge of collapse because they have moved away from traditional values, and describing Washington as the supporter of revolutions in the region.

Researchers have tracked similar themes coming from Russian accounts, including a rise in posts claiming that NATO and Ukrainian forces are preparing to attack Russian speakers in Ukraine. Allegations of a NATO intervention in Ukraine first hit a peak in late December before spiking higher in mid-January, according to Logically.

Mr. Murphy, the former head of the Department of Homeland Security's intelligence branch, said that claiming NATO interference in Ukraine has long been a standard line of attack by Moscow.

While it is often difficult to track where a particular piece of disinformation originates, researchers can see when many Russian accounts begin pushing the same narrative.

“It looks like a coordinated campaign,” Mr. Murphy said. “They come out, around the same time, with similar messaging.”

The claim that the United States was preparing a chemical attack was originally made by the Russian defense minister. But disinformation experts tracked how various accounts amplified it.

Versions of the statement were recirculated by both state-owned media and websites that the U.S. government has said are used by Russian intelligence services, such as News Front and the Strategic Culture Foundation, said Bret Schafer, the head of the information manipulation team at the Alliance for Securing Democracy, which tracks disinformation and other efforts aimed at undercutting democratic governments. The timing of the posts was curious, he said.

A few weeks after the posts appeared in December, American officials said that a false flag operation conducted by Russia could be used as an excuse to move troops into Ukraine in the name of protecting the Russian-speaking population.

“One could conceivably view Russian messaging last month as an attempt to muddy the water before their own impending operation,” Mr. Schafer said. “Or, in classic propaganda terms, to accuse others of that which you are guilty.”

Larissa Doroshenko, a researcher at Northeastern University, said that Russian disinformation tactics in Ukraine used both falsified stories and those that were true but tangential to current events in order to distort narratives or hide true intentions.

Dr. Doroshenko studied Russian disinformation around the 2014 pro-democracy protests in Ukraine and found that even then, Moscow used various means to push narratives.

“We focus on the social media, but it is a multiplatform approach,” she said. “It is social media, but it is also these so-called news websites, these propaganda websites, that present themselves to appeal to regular people.”

Mr. Putin took Crimea stealthily, Dr. Doroshenko said. But the troop buildup near Ukraine has been anything but hidden.

She said the Russian troop deployments and threats against Ukraine may be as much about stoking nationalistic feelings as they are about muting domestic criticism of Mr. Putin’s moves to shut down nonprofit groups like Memorial International, a human rights organization, or groups affiliated with Aleksei A. Navalny, the Russian opposition leader.

“If you can create an external enemy,” she said, “all these issues of what are happening with civic society in Russia are not as important anymore.”

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HEADLINE	01/25 Judge stays New York mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/25/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#nyc-mask-mandate-ruling
GIST	<p>ALBANY, N.Y. — New York State’s indoor mask mandate will remain in effect after an appeals court judge on Tuesday temporarily blocked a lower-court ruling from a day before that had abruptly struck down the rule and created confusion across schools and businesses.</p> <p>The decision on Tuesday came after a ruling on Monday by Justice Thomas Rademaker, of State Supreme Court in Nassau County, who had said the rule requiring masks violated the State Constitution.</p>

His ruling had abruptly nullified part of the rule imposed by Gov. Kathy Hochul last month, amid a surge in coronavirus cases driven by the Omicron variant, that required masks or proof of full vaccination at all indoor public spaces statewide.

Ms. Hochul immediately vowed to fight the decision, with Letitia James, the state attorney general, filing a motion to stay the ruling in an attempt to put it on hold while the state filed a formal appeal.

On Tuesday afternoon, Justice Robert J. Miller, the state appeals court judge, sided with the state and granted the stay, effectively allowing the mask rule to temporarily go back into effect. Justice Miller scheduled another hearing on the matter for Friday morning.

Despite the reprieve, the ruling on Monday had injected a jolt of uncertainty across the state at a time when New York is still grappling with the tail end of a surge in coronavirus cases and hospitalizations. It left parents and teachers scrambling all of Tuesday to decipher whether children would be required to wear masks in schools and it revived political flash points over mask-wearing.

While officials said the ruling only affected the state mask rule, and did not supersede any local or federal rules around masking, state officials scrambled on Monday night to let hundreds of school districts know that they should continue to follow the mask rule while the legal issues were ironed out.

But some schools, especially on Long Island, where mask mandates have become particularly divisive, said they would take Justice Rademaker's decision as license to shift their policies. They informed parents through late night and early morning posts on their websites and social media pages that masks would be optional for staff and students on Tuesday.

City Hall officials, for example, said that the decision had no immediate impact on New York City's schools since the city's education department had its own masking policies in place before the state's mandate.

Ms. Hochul defended the mandate at a virus briefing on Tuesday in Syracuse.

She asked that parents and students continue to follow the mask policy, which she said was critical to beating back the Omicron variant and keeping children in schools.

"The last thing I want to see is a different trend because people gave up on the masks," she said.

The Omicron surge has been receding in New York, but it is not over. An average of about 20,000 people in the state are now testing positive for the coronavirus each day, down sharply from the surge's peak of 90,000 people who tested positive on Jan. 7. The positivity rate has also fallen, by half, from more than 22 percent to 10 percent.

But New York's daily case numbers remain far higher than at the start of the surge in early December, and hospitals are still straining to treat about 10,000 Covid patients statewide. Hospitalizations have begun declining but remain higher than at any point since May 2020. More than 130 people each day have been dying of the virus statewide.

[Justice Rademaker](#), who has run on [the Conservative Party line](#), was elected to the Supreme Court in Nassau County in 2019. The Supreme Court in New York is the highest trial court in the state, but not the court of last resort; the Court of Appeal is the highest court.

Following his ruling, some school districts on Long Island began telling parents that masks were optional as of Tuesday morning.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Burkina Faso coup: a call for Russia help
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/world/africa/burkina-faso-coup-russians.html

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso — The morning after the coup in Burkina Faso, a crowd of revelers celebrating the military takeover in the dusty main plaza of the capital had two messages for the outside world: No to France, and yes to Russia.

“We want a partnership with Russia,” said Bertrand Yoda, a civil engineer who shouted to make himself heard amid hundreds of horn-honking, cheering people gathered in a raucous show of appreciation for the new military junta. “Long live Russia!”

Mutinying soldiers seized power in this poor West African nation on Monday, riding a wave of boiling frustration at the government’s failure to stem surging Islamist violence that since 2016 has displaced 1.4 million people, killed 2,000 and destabilized perhaps two-thirds of a once-peaceful country.

But now that the democratically elected president, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, has been sidelined — the military says he is being detained — coup supporters have turned to remaking Burkina’s Faso’s foreign alliances. Their preferences were broadcast in the Russian flags that fluttered in the capital, Ouagadougou, on Tuesday, alongside blunt, hand-painted signs aimed directly at Burkina Faso’s former colonial ruler.

“No to France,” one read.

The sudden clamor for Moscow’s help was a further sign of how Islamist violence across the Sahel, a vast region south of the Sahara, is upending old alliances and eroding pro-Western, if often weak, democratic political orders.

Many people at the protest said they were inspired by Russia’s intervention in the Central African Republic, where Russians guard the president, Russian companies mine for diamonds, and Russian mercenaries fought off an Islamist offensive last year — as well as a more recent Russian foray into Mali, the country to the north of Burkina Faso.

“The Russians got good results in other African countries,” Mr. Yoda said. “We hope they can do the same here.”

There are no Russian troops known to be in Burkina Faso, and it is unclear if the country’s new military ruler, Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, wants them to come. On Tuesday, The Daily Beast reported that Lieutenant Colonel Damiba had implored President Kaboré to hire the Wagner Group, a Kremlin-linked mercenary group earlier this month.

Several U.S. officials privately questioned this account, but said it was entirely plausible that the new military government could seek Russian assistance.

It wasn’t clear how Russian flags ended up at a pro-military demonstration in central Ouagadougou on Tuesday, less than 24 hours after the coup. The Russian Embassy in Burkina Faso could not be reached for comment on Tuesday. But the rally was one indication of an effort to pave the way for Russian intervention in yet another African nation.

“The difficulties Europe and in particular France have faced in reining in jihadist groups in the Sahel has provided an opportunity for Russia to expand its security cooperation, particularly in Mali,” said Andrew Lebovich, a policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, a research body.

Russian intervention in Africa often focuses on resource-rich countries in dire need of military help where Western influence is waning or absent, analysts point out. Russian help comes in the form of military advisers, weapons or mercenaries, paid for with cash or mining concessions for gold, diamonds and other resources.

The Russian presence is dominant in the Central African Republic, but Russia is also known to have intervened, to varying degrees, in Mozambique, Libya and Sudan, among other countries.

More recently, Russia's focus has shifted to the Sahel, where it is taking advantage of growing anti-France sentiment and its own reputation for effectiveness in combat, Mr. Lebovich said. But he added, "the record of Russian private military companies in Africa and the Middle East is at best mixed, and marred by significant abuses."

The United States also has a link to the Burkina Faso coup.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Africa Command confirmed that Lieutenant Colonel Damiba participated in numerous American military courses and exercises between 2010 and 2020, joining a long list of African coup leaders who received American military training.

Lieutenant Colonel Damiba received instruction on the law of armed conflict, civilian control and respect for human rights, Kelly Cahalan, a spokeswoman for the Africa command, said in an email. "Military seizures of power are inconsistent with U.S. military training and education," she wrote.

The warm welcome received by Russia in some African countries contrasts sharply with the unfolding crisis in Ukraine, where the United States and its NATO allies fear an imminent invasion.

Even so, Russia has stirred a diplomatic hornet's nest with its recent move into Mali, where the ruling military junta turned last fall to the Wagner Group in its fight against Islamists.

That deployment, which saw the first reported clashes between Russian mercenaries and Islamist fighters earlier this month, has infuriated France, which since 2014 has deployed thousands of troops to the Sahel, including Mali, to help its former colonies counter the growing terrorist menace.

But it piqued interest in Burkina Faso, where civilians and military officers who despaired of their own, French-backed efforts to fight the Islamists began to consider the Russian model as a viable alternative.

"We support the Russians," said Aminata Cissé, a water seller who joined the crowds celebrating military rule. "Our families are dying, and unemployment is rising, yet France hasn't helped much. At least we can try something new."

Public opinion in favor of a Russian intervention gathered momentum on social media in recent weeks, several residents said. On Facebook, in particular, people in Burkina Faso reposted news accounts of the Russian deployment to Mali.

They also noted heated criticism by Malian leaders of France's decision to draw down its troops and close three key bases in northern Mali since last October.

At the United Nations in September the interim prime minister of Mali, Choguel Kokalla Maiga, accused France of abandoning his country, saying it would force Mali to seek "new partners."

In the crowd in Ouagadougou on Tuesday, several people said they were inspired by Mali's defiance of France. They viewed Monday's military takeover, and their desired pivot to Russia, as a chance to achieve "total independence" from France, which formally left Burkina Faso in 1960.

Analysts say this week's coup has dealt a new blow to France's faltering effort to stabilize the Sahel. But a senior French military official dismissed suggestions that Burkina Faso was about to swing abruptly toward Russia.

The fact that Lieutenant Colonel Damiba was trained in Paris, not in Moscow, means that France "should be able" to find a way to continue its decades-old cooperation with the army of Burkina Faso, said the official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss national security issues.

But, he added, "We'll have to be active to avoid any vacuum the Russians could exploit."

HEADLINE	01/25 US, China slowdowns stymie global growth
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/business/imf-world-economic-report.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Business
GIST	<p>Slowdowns in the world's two biggest economies — the United States and China — are likely to be larger than expected this year, dragging down output on every continent and reducing global growth, a new report warned on Tuesday.</p> <p>Higher inflation, supply chain choke points, and Covid-related shutdowns and worker shortages continue to afflict rich and poor nations, the International Monetary Fund wrote in its latest World Economic Report.</p> <p>“The global economy enters 2022 in a weaker position than previously expected,” the fund said in reducing its estimated global growth rate to 4.4 percent from the 4.9 percent it projected just three months ago.</p> <p>The fund said the Federal Reserve Bank's tighter monetary policy and the failure of the Biden administration's sweeping \$2.2 trillion infrastructure and social policy package were among the reasons it reduced the U.S. growth forecast by 1.2 percentage points to 4 percent.</p> <p>In China, which has powered much of the world's growth in recent years, the I.M.F. pointed to the collapse of the real estate sector and the zero-Covid policy that has restricted travel, shut businesses and reduced consumption. The report reduced the country's growth forecast by 0.8 percentage points to 4.8 percent.</p> <p>The fund emphasized that the forecast was subject to a high level of uncertainty — about the course of Covid, the prospects of climate-related natural disasters, supply chain disruptions and rising political tensions, particularly around Ukraine. With the pandemic entering its third year, a note of pessimism underlay the report. “Risks overall are to the downside,” Gita Gopinath, the first managing deputy director, said.</p> <p>Global economic losses related to the pandemic will total \$13.8 trillion by the end of 2024, Ms. Gopinath estimated.</p> <p>The dimmed economic prospects come at a time when governments have less room to maneuver in how they spend their money. Debt levels have soared over the past two years as countries struggled with the health crisis caused by the pandemic and funneled aid to their citizens. Public spending is unlikely to reach the same levels in the future.</p> <p>The troubling rise in inflation that has doubled heating costs in much of Europe and made food less affordable in places like sub-Saharan Africa and Brazil has also lasted longer than anticipated.</p> <p>The pandemic has changed the way people in many parts of the world spend their money, shifting funds that might have been used for dining, travel and entertainment to goods they can play with, sit on or consume at home. That increased demand, combined with persistent difficulties in moving goods from one city or continent to another, skyrocketing energy prices and labor shortages, has driven up costs.</p> <p>Some of those pressures are expected to wane toward the end of the year — but not everywhere. “In the United States the story is different,” the fund noted. The exit of so many people from their jobs has created more persistent labor shortages and driven up wages much more than in other countries. Americans' high level of spending has also created some of the worst supply chain disruptions.</p> <p>The U.S. Federal Reserve has made clear that its primary focus has shifted from stimulating the economy during the pandemic to fighting inflation. The bank, which is set to release its next policy statement on</p>

Wednesday, is raising interest rates and reeling in its purchases of bonds that ensured money would continue to flow through the economy. Other central banks, including those in Mexico and Brazil, are taking similar actions.

The strategy is to discourage people from borrowing money to buy a car or invest in a business and ratchet back demand for products that are in short supply. Creeping interest rates, though, risk not only slowing economic growth but burdening poorer nations with even bigger debts far into the future.

“If interest rates rise more sharply, that then puts extra strain on vulnerable developing countries which have most of their debt in dollars,” said Creon Butler, research director at Chatham House, a London research organization. That means governments must use scarce resources to repay bulging loans instead of adding hospital beds or feeding hungry children.

The slowdown in China, which is both a major supplier and buyer of goods traded with other countries, is also setting off reverberations around the world. The once exuberant [real estate market](#) has plunged. The government has imposed the world’s most stringent restrictions and lockdowns to contain Covid, and unexpected power outages have further hindered industrial production.

Growth in the euro area was revised down 0.4 percentage points to 3.9 percent, but for some countries, the drop was much steeper. Clogs in the supply chain, especially those affecting the auto industry, prompted the I.M.F. to estimate that growth in Germany — the largest economy in Europe — would decline by 0.8 percentage points, twice as much as the average of all countries that use the euro.

Covid continues to maintain its grip and the threat of a new variant remains, but the fund expects severe illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths to drop to low levels by the end of the year.

Claus Vistlesen, chief eurozone economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said the impact of this latest surge had not been as devastating: “We’re seeing evidence that Omicron is holding back economic activity, but nowhere near to the same extent as the virus did before.”

Although the fund raised its growth expectations for 2023, it emphasized that the small improvement would be insufficient to counteract the slowdown in 2022.

Ms. Gopinath of the I.M.F. emphasized that however difficult the recovery had been in wealthier nations, emerging economies had been hit the hardest, with weak growth and low vaccination rates.

With 70 million more people living in extreme poverty than before the pandemic, the fund called for more international cooperation to work out debt relief for struggling nations as well as more equitable distribution of Covid vaccines, tests and treatments.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Study: 4 factors raise chance of long Covid
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/health/long-covid-risk-factors.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Health
GIST	<p>It is one of many mysteries about long Covid: Who is more prone to developing it? Are some people more likely than others to experience physical, neurological or cognitive symptoms that can emerge, or linger for, months after their coronavirus infections have cleared?</p> <p>Now, a team of researchers who followed more than 200 patients for two to three months after their Covid diagnoses report that they have identified biological factors that might help predict if a person will develop long Covid.</p> <p>The study, published Tuesday by the journal Cell, found four factors that could be identified early in a person’s coronavirus infection that appeared to correlate with increased risk of having lasting symptoms weeks later.</p>

The researchers said they had found that there was an association between these factors and long Covid (which goes by the medical name post-acute sequelae of Covid-19, or PASC) whether the initial infection was serious or mild. They said that the findings might suggest ways to prevent or treat some cases of long Covid, including the possibility of giving people antiviral medications soon after an infection has been diagnosed.

“It’s the first real solid attempt to come up with some biologic mechanisms for long Covid,” said Dr. Steven Deeks, a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, who was not involved in the study.

He and other experts, along with the study authors themselves, cautioned that the findings were exploratory and would need to be verified by considerably more research.

Still, Dr. Deeks said: “They’ve identified these four major factors. Each is biologically plausible, consistent with theories that other people are pursuing, and importantly, each is actionable. If these pathways get confirmed, we as clinicians can actually design interventions to make people better. That is the take-home message.”

One of the four factors researchers identified is the level of coronavirus RNA in the blood early in the infection, an indicator of viral load. Another is the presence of certain autoantibodies — antibodies that mistakenly attack tissues in the body as they do in conditions like lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. A third factor is the reactivation of Epstein-Barr virus, a virus that infects most people, often when they are young, and then usually becomes dormant.

The final factor is having Type 2 diabetes, although the researchers and other experts said that in studies involving larger numbers of patients, it might turn out that diabetes is only one of several medical conditions that increase the risk of long Covid.

“I think this research stresses the importance of doing measurements early in the disease course to figure out how to treat patients, even if we don’t really know how we’re going to use all that information yet,” said Jim Heath, the principal investigator of the study and president of the Institute for Systems Biology, a nonprofit biomedical research organization in Seattle.

“Once you can measure something, then you may be able to start doing something about it,” Dr. Heath said, adding: “We did this analysis because we know patients will go to physicians and they’ll say that they’re tired all the time or whatever, and the physician just tells them to get more sleep. That’s not very helpful. So, we wanted to actually have a way to quantify and say that there’s actually something wrong with these patients.”

The complex study had several components and involved dozens of researchers at several universities and centers, including the Institute for Systems Biology, the University of Washington and Swedish Medical Center in Seattle, where the study’s lead medical author, Dr. Jason Goldman, is an infectious disease specialist.

The primary group of patients included 209 people, ages 18 to 89, who were infected with the coronavirus during 2020 or early 2021 and were seen at Swedish Medical Center or an affiliated clinic. Many were hospitalized for their initial infections, but some were seen only as outpatients. Researchers analyzed blood and nasal swabs when patients were diagnosed, during the acute phase of their infections and two to three months later.

They surveyed the patients about 20 symptoms associated with long Covid, including fatigue, brain fog and shortness of breath, and corroborated those reports with electronic health records, Dr. Heath said.

He said that 37 percent of the patients had reported three or more symptoms of long Covid two or three months after infection. A further 24 percent reported one or two symptoms, and 39 percent reported no

symptoms. Of patients reporting three or more symptoms, 95 percent had one or more of the four biological factors identified in the study when they were diagnosed with Covid-19, Dr. Heath said.

The most influential factor appeared to be autoantibodies, which were associated with two-thirds of the cases of long Covid, Dr. Heath said. Each of the other three factors showed up in about a third of the cases, he said, and there was considerable overlap, with several factors identified in some patients.

The researchers corroborated some of their findings in a separate group of 100 patients, many with mild initial infections, from research led by Dr. Helen Chu at the University of Washington. The researchers also compared their results to data from 457 healthy people.

“The study is large and comprehensive and is a great resource for the community studying long Covid,” said Akiko Iwasaki, an immunologist at Yale, who was not involved in the research.

Dr. Avindra Nath, who is chief of the section on infections of the nervous system at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke and was not involved in the study, called the study well designed but pointed out several weaknesses, including the fact that patients had been followed for only two to three months. “This might be too short a time frame,” he said. “Some might just improve spontaneously with time.”

Dr. Iwasaki noted that 71 percent of the patients in the primary group had been hospitalized, limiting the ability to conclude that the biological factors were equally relevant for people with mild initial infections.

One persuasive conclusion, several experts said, was the suggestion that because patients with high viral loads early on often developed long Covid, giving people antivirals soon after diagnosis might help prevent long-term symptoms.

“The quicker one can eliminate the virus, the less likelihood of developing persistent virus or autoimmunity, which may drive long Covid,” Dr. Iwasaki said.

That some patients had reactivated Epstein-Barr virus also made sense, Dr. Nath said, because other diseases have reawakened that virus, and its reactivation has been linked to conditions like chronic fatigue syndrome, which some cases of long Covid resemble, and multiple sclerosis. Dr. Deeks said it might be possible to give antivirals or immunotherapy to patients with reactivated Epstein-Barr virus.

There were other intriguing findings that experts said needed more substantiation. One was a suggestion that because people with lingering respiratory problems had low levels of the stress hormone cortisol, they might benefit from cortisol replacement therapy, which Dr. Heath said some doctors were already trying.

In another finding that he said might provide a way to document that patients’ neurological symptoms resulted from long Covid, the blood of people with lingering neurological issues contained elevated levels of proteins associated with disrupted circadian rhythms and sleep/wake cycles.

One patient in the study’s primary group was John Gillotte, 40, a software engineer who contracted the coronavirus in March 2020. He was on a ventilator for about six days, after which he experienced delirium in the hospital when he closed his eyes.

“I saw the devil, who was like 50 feet tall, screaming at me, throwing limbs that he dismembered off of other people,” recalled Mr. Gillotte, who later had an image of the demon tattooed on his right arm, with depictions of hell below and heaven above to symbolize his progress from illness to recovery.

Mr. Gillotte, who moved from Seattle to Manhattan last year, said that for several months after his infection, he had experienced muscle weakness, lack of stamina, brain fog that impaired his concentration at work, an altered sense of smell and the perception that most food tasted like ashes.

	<p>He said that before Covid, he had a spontaneous ability to visualize specific colors with certain foods — pink when he sprinkled pepper, blue with a type of liquor — but now, he is dismayed to have lost those automatic connections.</p> <p>Mr. Gillotte said he doesn't have diabetes and didn't know if he had the other three factors because researchers said the study protocol prevented them from disclosing data about participants.</p> <p>Dr. Heath, however, noted that Mr. Gillotte had been reinfected with the coronavirus in October 2020, which might reflect one theory that emerged from their study: that patients with higher levels of autoantibodies had lower levels of protective antibodies against the coronavirus, possibly making them more vulnerable to reinfection.</p> <p>Dr. Deeks said lower protective antibody levels could also be a pathway leading to long-term symptoms. "If you don't have a good antibody response, you don't clear the virus; you have more virus around, and that leads to more long Covid," he said.</p> <p>Still, Dr. Heath said that overall, the research had showed that the four biological factors intersected and overlapped, suggesting that there might be relatively straightforward ways to forestall long Covid early on. Months later, "all these vague symptoms are so hard to track down, because you've sort of lost that information, but if you look back when those symptoms are first triggered, it actually looks like it's manageable."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 WSF ferry cancellations go 'beyond Covid'
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3324009/washington-ferry-cancellations-go-beyond-covid-report-highlights-systemic-staffing-issues/
GIST	<p>Last week, the Washington State Ferries (WSF) announced that "most" of their routes were placed on reduced, alternate schedules, citing crew shortages brought on by the pandemic and a "global shortage of mariners."</p> <p>The problem is a persistent one as funding and labor shortages have been a recurring issue for the ferry system for decades.</p> <p>Tim Eyman's Initiative 695 from 1999 cut the state's ability to impose local motor vehicle excise taxes — car tabs — which funded passenger-only ferries. While the Washington Supreme Court would later overturn that initiative, the Seattle Times attributes that tax cut to a decade-long delay in ferry construction, with the beginning of a newly constructed fleet only ready to sail in 2024.</p> <p>The Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) will look to appropriate more funds to Washington ferries this session. However, ferry cancellations are the result of more than just a lack of money.</p> <p>The JTC has commissioned a series of reports under a "workforce plan" to identify why the ferries experience staffing shortages and solutions therein. The first of which, an overtime report analysis, was published in recent weeks. It outlines a number of contributing factors to the staffing shortage.</p> <p>According to that report, ferry cancellations relate to fickle scheduling and a staffing model that dissuades prospective crewmembers.</p> <p>"All Deck and Engine crew are hired as on-call Ordinary Sailors or Oilers," the report reads. "The volatile hours and pay make on-call positions unattractive to potential applicants and inaccessible to many."</p> <p>"Employees remain in on-call positions until a permanent position opens, typically long after they have exited the probationary period, often years."</p>

New crew members are considered probationary for the first 1,040 hours of employment. During that time, they are on call until a permanent position becomes available, and sometimes even beyond.

“I think we’re going to need to look at the the staffing model that the ferry system has to make it a more attractive place to work,” Gov. Jay Inslee said in an October news conference.

“To change that staffing model takes additional dollars, and the Legislature is going to need to help solve that problem to make it a more attractive place to come to work,” Inslee continued. “That has been a long standing challenge.”

The JTC report makes preliminary recommendations to address these problems — a number of which have to do with improving community outreach to increase the number of new-hires. Some of the Legislature’s solutions are more stringent.

[House Bill 1608](#) takes a step beyond improving access to education and hiring by removing or amending collective bargaining agreements with Washington State Ferries.

“In light of the state ferry’s desire to hire and retain a more diverse workforce, it is critical that collective bargaining agreements be reviewed through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion,” the draft bill reads. “Some provisions in existing collective bargaining agreements may unintentionally create barriers to hiring and retaining a more diverse workforce. It is necessary for such provisions to be removed or amended.”

Three weeks into the Legislature’s 2022 session, the Republican-sponsored bill has not received a hearing, and one has not been scheduled as of Jan. 24.

“There have been several proposals,” Rep. Andrew Barkis (Republican, 2nd District) told MyNorthwest. “There are several things addressing workforce development, requests for overtime, a multitude of things. Most of the items are on hold. ... We will be taking some actions because of the ongoing problem [with] workforce development.”

“The ferries are an aging workforce with a complicated workforce structure,” Barkis continued. “They had not done a good job with their planning for workforce development. We are starting to get more detail on where the work needs to be focused, and now we can focus the resources on the accountability measures for the ferry system to deliver, which they will need to do. They are facing a situation that goes beyond COVID.”

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HEADLINE	01/25 Concrete workers strike hits Sound Transit
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3323592/concrete-worker-strike-crippling-major-construction-projects-in-king-county/
GIST	<p>Will light rail expansion projects across King County be delayed by the ongoing concrete workers strike? It’s been nearly two months since any concrete was delivered.</p> <p>Imagine you are building the largest expansion of light rail in the country, but you can’t get any concrete delivered. That’s the situation for Sound Transit, as more than 300 concrete workers continue their strike against six King County companies.</p> <p>In the seven weeks since the strike began, Sound Transit has not received more than 14,000 cubic yards of concrete, which the agency’s John Gallagher puts into perspective.</p> <p>“That means more than 1,400 missed deliveries,” he said. “If you lined all those trucks up, it would be a line of more than 9 miles.”</p>

It's hard to build guideways and parking garages without those 1,400 concrete deliveries. Gallagher visited the Shoreline south station last week.

"There are a number of forms that are there that are waiting for concrete to be poured, and those are obviously on hold," he said. "There's just a lot of work that's on pause right at the moment."

The biggest impact has been felt on the Lynnwood extension.

Gallagher said this strike is also impacting jobs.

"So far, the contractors have had to lay off about 164 workers, and there are more than another 120 workers who are likely to be laid-off in the coming weeks," he said.

The big question for the public is what will a protracted strike mean for opening the light rail extensions? Right now, this hasn't impacted those long-term schedules, but it could going forward.

And all Sound Transit can do at this point is sit on the sidelines of negotiations and hope the strike is resolved quickly.

"We would just like to get back to work," Gallagher said. "That's why we're just calling on both sides to get back to the negotiating table, with an unbiased mediator, resume negotiations so the work can get back underway."

A mediator was called in last week to help settle the dispute, but talks did not go anywhere. It was the first meeting between the two sides in months.

This strike isn't just impacting Sound Transit either. Anyone who needs concrete in King County is struggling — both public and private projects.

The City of Seattle has also delayed several projects that were set to start this year, and the strike has impacted the construction of the Bus Rapid Transit corridor on Madison Avenue.

The Washington State Department of Transportation said the strike has led to contractor layoffs and delays across its projects in King County, including the 520 Bridge project and the expansion of 405 between Renton and Bellevue.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Job market recovery slow, uneven
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/25/economy/us-pandemic-job-market-texas-arizona/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business) America's job market hasn't fully recovered yet. But some states are already back to normal.</p> <p>In November, Texas and Arizona joined Utah and Idaho in recouping all their pandemic job losses, according to a report by ratings agency Fitch.</p> <p>In comparison, California and New York were at only 70% and 60% of their pre-pandemic employment levels, respectively.</p> <p>This highlights just how uneven the recovery has been. States that were more affected by the waves of the pandemic and had tighter restrictions to fight the outbreak are lagging behind in recovering from their Covid job losses.</p> <p>After record job losses at the start of the pandemic, nearly all states have recovered at least half of those lost jobs, with the exception of Hawaii and Wyoming, according to Fitch.</p>

States like Hawaii, which relies on tourism, are still hamstrung by the pandemic. Meanwhile, New York has a more diversified economy but was an epicenter of the outbreak right at the start of the health crisis, which is leaving marks.

Overall, the US economy added 249,000 jobs in November — a [disappointing number compared with forecasts](#). But the jobs report that month still showed signs of the recovery moving ahead, including a falling unemployment rate and a slightly higher labor force participation rate.

The key factor about November, however, was that the [Omicron variant of the coronavirus](#) hadn't weighed on the recovery yet. Covid cases rose again around year-end due to the highly infectious variant, leading [businesses to struggle with a sick workforce](#).

"Recovery trends, boosted by in-person education and greater return to in-person work, may be threatened by the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, whose economic implications remain uncertain," said Olu Sonola, head of US Regional Economics at Fitch.

Both remote schooling and working increased again in January as businesses and school districts reacted to the new outbreak, according to Fitch.

CNN Business' [Back-to-Normal Index](#), created with Moody's Analytics, stood at 91% as of last week. Only South Dakota was more than 100% recovered, though a few states, including Idaho, Arizona, Florida and Montana are getting close.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Russia military drills; blames US on 'lies'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/25/world/ukraine-russia-us#russia-announces-a-flurry-of-military-drills-and-blames-the-us-for-escalation
GIST	<p>With little sign of diplomatic progress, and rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War, Russia on Tuesday announced a flurry of military drills across its vast territory, spanning from the Pacific Ocean to its western flank around Ukraine.</p> <p>The announcement, which followed a series of military moves made by the United States and NATO aimed at deterring a Russian incursion into Ukraine, demonstrated the vast reach of the Russian forces and were carried out by units positioned to the north, south and east of Ukraine.</p> <p>They involved tanks and drones, troops from regular infantry and elite paratroopers. They took place both near Ukraine and far from the region, with three navy ships taking part in joint drills with the Chinese fleet in the Arabian Sea, the Russian defense ministry said. The Russians limited access to independent journalists, instead releasing photos and video of the drills.</p> <p>In the west of Russia, crews boarded the Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile systems, drove them to a training ground, and lifted their missiles up in their combat positions, according to a video released by the ministry.</p> <p>Closer to Ukraine, Russian troops continued to disembark heavy-duty armored vehicles and other equipment from rail platforms in Belarus, ahead of joint drills with Belarusian forces.</p> <p>Belarus shares a border with Ukraine, and NATO and U.S. officials have warned that the influx of Russian forces there could threaten the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, less than 50 miles from Belarusian territory.</p> <p>Dmitri S. Peskov, the spokesman for President Vladimir V. Putin, dismissed such fears on Tuesday, saying that tensions around Ukraine have been stirred up by the United States.</p> <p>"We are observing such actions of the United States with profound concern," Mr. Peskov said when asked about the American decision to put 8,500 troops on "high alert."</p>

	<p>On Monday, in more extensive comments, Mr. Peskov said the U.S. and NATO were orchestrating “information hysteria” around Ukraine by reporting “lies” and “fakes.”</p> <p>“I would like to note that this is happening not because of what Russia is doing,” he said. “It is happening because of what NATO and the U.S. do, because of the information that they spread,” he said.</p> <p>On the other side of Ukraine, in Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, Russian tanks launched planned shooting exercises. The Russian contingent in Transnistria, a breakaway region of Moldova, on Ukraine’s southwest, was put on combat alert as part of a planned exercise, the ministry said.</p> <p>Other exercises were also reported in the North Caucasus, near Moscow, in the Baltic Sea. In the Ivanovo region near Moscow, the Yars mobile missile launcher vehicles, used for intercontinental missiles, began patrolling the area.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 CDC: fewer hospitalizations omicron surge
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/25/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#omicron-infections-lead-to-fewer-hospitalizations-than-delta-a-cdc-report-finds
GIST	<p>A smaller share of Americans with coronavirus cases have been admitted to hospitals during the surge of the Omicron variant than during previous waves, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The report added to heartening signs from other countries and from certain health systems in the United States that Omicron, while highly contagious, is causing less severe illness — a result of growing levels of immunity in the population, as well as Omicron itself often triggering less serious symptoms.</p> <p>Yet the report also offers some cause for concern. Because of soaring infection levels, the peak level of daily hospital admissions was higher than during previous surges. And deaths in the United States have risen in recent days.</p> <p>The number of people infected with the coronavirus visiting emergency departments was 86 percent higher than during the Delta wave in the fall, the C.D.C. said, and the number of people with Covid admitted to the hospital was 76 percent higher.</p> <p>The agency tracked data up until Jan. 15, when it said that the increase in hospital admissions appeared to be slowing. Up until that point, the average number of Americans dying from Covid every day was lower than during previous waves. But the death toll has since been climbing, and in recent days surpassed the peak average number of daily deaths during the Delta-driven surge of cases in the fall.</p> <p>The C.D.C. attributed the tendency of Omicron cases to cause less severe illness to the virus itself, as well as growing levels of immunity from prior infections and from the rollout of vaccinations. It said that roughly 30 million more people were fully vaccinated during the Omicron surge than during the Delta wave in the fall.</p> <p>As a result, a smaller proportion of coronavirus cases are ending in hospitalizations: The C.D.C. said there had been a peak of 27 hospital admissions for every 1,000 cases in January, compared with 78 admissions per 1,000 cases in the fall.</p> <p>And the share of hospitalized Covid patients admitted to intensive care units during the Omicron wave was 29 percent lower than last winter and 26 percent lower than in the fall, the C.D.C. said.</p> <p>The agency cautioned, though, that a number of factors made it tricky to compare the toll from different waves. Its hospital data, for example, did not rule out people whose coronavirus infections had nothing to do with their hospitalization.</p>

	And the period that the C.D.C. referred to as the Omicron surge, starting on Dec. 19, overlapped with the period when people infected with the Delta variant would still have been in hospitals, making it more difficult to distinguish the impact of one variant from another.
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HEADLINE	01/25 China: Covid case in Olympic bubble
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/25/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#beijing-olympics-china-bubble
GIST	<p>Olympic officials in China said on Tuesday that they had confirmed a coronavirus case connected to a foreign athlete or team official who is part of a bubble set up to insulate participants in the Beijing Games from the rest of the country.</p> <p>The 2022 Winter Olympic Organizing Committee said the case was one of three new confirmed ones among 15 infections. Twelve of the positive cases were among new arrivals.</p> <p>The outbreak underscores the reality that the virus is likely to continue to spread within the bubble — which was set up as much to protect China from a Covid-19 outbreak as it was to shield the athletes — as participants continue to arrive in Beijing over the coming week.</p> <p>In an effort to stop the spread of the coronavirus, China has sought to separate Olympic participants. Athletes will eat, live and compete only among a group of people who do not interact with the general population.</p> <p>Olympics officials say that participants who test positive but are asymptomatic will be sent to a special quarantine area within the bubble. Others will be treated in one of two hospitals.</p> <p>With China committed to a zero-tolerance approach to the spread of the virus, the precautions around the bubble are tougher than the measures taken in Tokyo during last year's Summer Olympics. Along with regular testing, participants will have to leave China immediately after the Games or face weeks of quarantine.</p> <p>The new coronavirus cases are not the first to emerge inside the bubble. Before Tuesday, there had been 35 Olympic personnel who tested positive for the virus in the bubble, though they were categorized as "other stakeholders," according to the committee. An additional 55 people tested positive on arrival during airport testing.</p> <p>Despite its aggressive efforts to stamp out the virus, China has struggled to contain new waves of infections across the country. This month, the organizing committee said that members of the public would not be sold tickets to attend the Games, except for a select few who would be screened in advance.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Orange juice prices are rising
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/why-orange-juice-prices-are-rising/
GIST	<p>Umatilla, Florida — The price of orange juice is the latest item putting a squeeze on pocketbooks.</p> <p>The reason is citrus greening, a disease afflicting Florida orange groves that is spread by an invasive insect.</p> <p>"All the roots are going to go first. So when you have no roots, you have no leaves, no fruit," grove owner Brian Faryna told CBS News.</p> <p>There's no known cure for citrus greening, so in groves that have already been affected it's safe to assume most trees have it to some degree. The tell-tale sign is the amount of fruit that's fallen to the ground or fruit that is unusually small.</p>

	<p>Faryna's family established a grove near Orlando 70 years ago. It's hard for him to imagine that Florida is forecast to have its smallest orange crop since before they laid down roots.</p> <p>"All of our land is citrus," he said. "And so we hear numbers like that and it's devastating."</p> <p>At its peak, Florida produced more than 244 million boxes of oranges a year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It's set to produce only 44.5 million this year. But as demand for orange juice grew during the pandemic, prices for orange juice concentrate rose nearly 14% last year. The low crop yield is likely to drive up prices even more in 2022.</p> <p>Faryna is now growing other crops to supplement the family income. But as other farmers seek other work or sell their land to developers, the number of acres harvested for oranges in the state has dropped by more than half over the past 20 years.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Monitoring new omicron subvariant BA.2
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/scientists-monitoring-omicron-subvariant-ba2/story?id=82472629
GIST	<p>Even as the omicron COVID-19 variant continues to sweep the globe, scientists are now monitoring a new mutation of omicron, dubbed BA.2.</p> <p>The World Health Organization maintains that BA.2 is not a "variant of concern," meaning there is no current evidence to suggest this new subvariant will worsen COVID-19 transmission, illness severity, or efficacy of vaccines and public health efforts like masking and social distancing.</p> <p>BA.2 numbers around the world are rising, with at least 40 countries reporting cases to a global variant tracking database, but the subvariant has spread rapidly in Denmark and the UK, with almost half of recent cases in Denmark attributed to BA.2.</p> <p>The subvariant has already been detected in several U.S. states, with Washington State confirming two cases Monday.</p> <p>While over 8,000 BA.2 cases have been identified since November 2021, it is unclear where BA.2 originated. Even though the first sequences were submitted from the Philippines, numerous cases have since been detected in various places, from Europe to South Asia.</p> <p>Given the rising numbers, health care organizations, like the WHO, are asking scientists to watch and study the new subvariant separately from omicron, to see if it behaves differently.</p> <p>"It is the nature of viruses to evolve and mutate, so it's to be expected that we will continue to see new variants emerge as the pandemic goes on," said Dr. Meera Chand, the COVID-19 incident director at the UK Health Security Agency, in prepared remarks. "So far, there is insufficient evidence to determine whether BA.2 causes more severe illness than Omicron BA.1, but data is limited."</p> <p>The evolution of COVID-19 subvariants is not new. The delta variant also had several subvariants, but scientists referred to all of them as delta. BA.2, however, has earned its own designation due to rising numbers across several nations.</p> <p>Although it's been called the "stealth" omicron variant, the new subvariant, "can absolutely be detected through traditional surveillance mechanisms whether through rapid testing or PCR," said Dr. John Brownstein, chief innovation officer at Harvard University's Boston Children's Hospital and ABC Medical Correspondent.</p> <p>Conventional COVID-19 tests can show a positive or a negative result, but they can't determine specific variants. For that, scientists need to do additional genetic sequencing. Conveniently, the omicron variant</p>

	<p>has a particular genetic signature that allows scientists to quickly and easily determine if the sample is omicron or not.</p> <p>The new BA.2 subvariant does not have that feature, meaning scientists can no longer use this shortcut -- though they can still identify the subvariant using genetic sequencing technology. Because of this, the BA.2 subvariant has sometimes been referred to as the "stealth" variant. But for the general public, conventional COVID-19 tests will still work to detect the new subvariant.</p> <p>Ultimately, while scientists and public health officials are urging continued research and surveillance, experts say there is little reason to worry.</p> <p>"BA.2 is important from a public health perspective, but it doesn't fundamentally change at this moment, how we think about the impact in the population," Brownstein said. "A lot more work needs to be done to understand severity, breakthrough infections, and immunizations before you can make any statement about clinical relevance."</p> <p>"While it's important to understand that in the family of omicron, there is a sub-lineage that is potentially more transmissible, it's not necessarily a cause for panic," Brownstein added.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Mexico remittances soar: top \$50B
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexicos-remittances-pass-50-billion-surge-pandemic-82478206
GIST	<p>COMACHUEN, Mexico -- Mexico's remittances — the money migrants send home to their relatives — have soared in the past two years, and are now expected to top \$50 billion for the first time once 2021's figures are added up. That would surpass almost all other sources of Mexico's foreign income.</p> <p>But as happy as the Mexican government is about the news — it calls the migrants “heroes” — the boom raises questions: Will Mexicans always have to emigrate? And is it sustainable, or just blip fueled in part by U.S. government pandemic support payments?</p> <p>In many rural places such as Comachuen, Michoacan, every store, business and family depends on remittances.</p> <p>“Without these remittances that migrants send back to their families here in Comachuen, the town would have no life,” said Porfirio Gabriel, who has spent nearly 13 years working on farms in the United States and now recruits and supervises people to go north.</p> <p>Remittances as a percentage of Mexico's GDP have almost doubled over the past decade, growing from 2% of GDP in 2010 to 3.8% in 2020, according to the government. Between 2010 and 2020, the percentage of households in Mexico receiving remittances grew from 3.6% to 5.1%.</p> <p>For the first 11 months of 2021, remittances grew by almost 27%. Mexico is now the third largest receiver of remittances in the world, behind only India and China, and Mexico now accounts for about 6.1% of world remittances, according to a government report.</p> <p>On one hand, the spike was simply a matter of need, caused in part by the coronavirus pandemic. Mexico's GDP shrank 8.5% in 2020, and while the economy recouped about 4.7% of that loss in the first three quarters of 2021, growth appears to have slowed and inflation spiked in the last quarter.</p> <p>“When a Mexican family suffers illness or their household suffers damage, they receive more. ... Why? Because, basically, they ask for help, and that is what I think happened here last year,” said Agustín Escobar, a professor at Mexico's Center for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology.</p>

Ironically, part of that growth may have been fueled by a temporary decrease several years ago in the number of new Mexican migrants heading to the United States and a decline in the relative percentage of migrants without proper documents.

Escobar said that means established migrants face less wage competition from new, young, undocumented arrivals.

“But how much it can continue to improve in the future is an open question,” he added.

And the fact that a smaller percentage of Mexican migrants don't have proper documents than before means more qualified for U.S. pandemic support payments in 2020.

A report by the Liberty Street Economics blog from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York said, “We find that about \$24 billion went to U.S. residents born in Mexico, Central America, and the Dominican Republic in April through September” of 2020 when pandemic support payments began to flow under the CARES Act.

While people in Comachuen report using their money to educate their children and build up businesses, research shows the vast majority of remittances are used for subsistence needs — buying more food or medicine, or much-needed household appliances like refrigerators that will save families on food costs in the long run.

There is also a strange dichotomy: The largest flows of remittances go to Mexico’s most violence-plagued states, like Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Jalisco and Michoacan.

Escobar said migration and crime sometimes go hand in hand. Those who receive funds from abroad become targets for criminals, creating fear that drives more to emigrate.

“Families in Michoacan are trying to hide that they are receiving remittances. They try to go to a bank branch that isn’t near their house, and not show it off, because these families become a target for kidnappings, to get the money,” Escobar said.

Raul Delgado, who heads the development studies unit at the University of Zacatecas, sees a “vicious, perverse cycle” in tougher U.S. border restrictions. They make immigrant smugglers more necessary, which in turn empowers criminal gangs, who in turn prey on local people, who have to leave their home communities because of the violence.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Indonesia capital sinking, polluted, moving
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/indonesias-capital-sinking-polluted-now-moving-82478579
GIST	<p>JAKARTA, Indonesia -- Jakarta is congested, polluted, prone to earthquakes and rapidly sinking into the Java Sea. Now the government is leaving, and moving the country's capital to the island of Borneo.</p> <p>President Joko Widodo envisions the construction of a new capital as a panacea for the problems plaguing Jakarta, reducing its population while allowing the country to start fresh with a “sustainable city” that has good public transportation, is integrated with its natural environment and is in an area that's not prone to natural disasters.</p> <p>“The construction of the new capital city is not merely a physical move of government offices,” Widodo said last week ahead of parliament's approval of the plan. “The main goal is to build a smart new city, a new city that is competitive at the global level, to build a new locomotive for the transformation ... toward an Indonesia based on innovation and technology based on a green economy.”</p> <p>Skeptics worry, however, about the environmental impact of plunking a sprawling 256,000-hectare (990 square mile) city down in Borneo's East Kalimantan province, which is home to orangutans, leopards and</p>

a wide array of other wildlife, as well as committing \$34 billion to the ambitious project amid a global pandemic.

“The new capital city's strategic environmental study shows that there are at least three basic problems,” said Dwi Sawung, an official with the WALHI environmental group.

“There are threats to water systems and risks of climate change, threats to flora and fauna, and threats of pollution and environmental damage,” she said.

First proposed in 2019, Widodo's plan to establish the city of Nusantara — an old Javanese term meaning “archipelago” — will entail constructing government buildings and housing from scratch. Initial estimates were that some 1.5 million civil servants would be relocated to the city, some 2,000 kilometers northeast of Jakarta, though ministries and government agencies are still working to finalize that number.

It will be located in the vicinity of Balikpapan, an East Kalimantan seaport with a population of about 700,000.

Indonesia is an archipelago nation of more than 17,000 islands, but currently 54% of the country's more than 270 million people live on Java, the country's most densely populated island and where Jakarta is located.

Jakarta itself is home to about 10 million people and three times that number in the greater metropolitan area.

It has been described as the world's most rapidly sinking city, and at the current rate, it is estimated that one-third of the city could be submerged by 2050. The main cause is uncontrolled ground water extraction, but it has been exacerbated by the rising Java Sea due to climate change.

Beyond that, its air and ground water are heavily polluted, it floods regularly and its streets are so clogged that it is estimated congestion costs the economy \$4.5 billion a year.

In constructing a purpose-built capital, Indonesia will be taking a path that others have in the past, including Pakistan, Brazil and Myanmar.

The committee overseeing the construction is led by Abu Dhabi's crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan — no stranger to ambitious building projects at home in the United Arab Emirates — and also includes Masayoshi Son, the billionaire founder and chief executive of Japanese holding company SoftBank, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who currently runs the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

State funds will pay for 19% of the project, with the rest coming from cooperation between the government and business entities and from direct investment by state-run companies and the private sector.

Public Works and Housing Minister Basuki Hadimuljono said initial planning had been carried out by clearing 56,180 hectares (138,800 acres) of land to build the presidential palace, the national parliament and government offices, as well as roads linking the capital to other cities in East Kalimantan.

The idea is to have the core government area done by 2024, Hadimuljono said. Current plans are for about 8,000 civil servants to have moved to the city by then.

Widodo previously said he expected the Presidential Palace would be moved to the new capital city before he ends his second term in 2024, along with the Home, Foreign, and Defense Ministries and the State Secretariat.

The whole relocation process is scheduled to be completed by 2045.

	<p>What effect it will have on Jakarta and the people who stay behind is unclear, said Agus Pambagio, a public policy expert from the University of Indonesia, who urged that anthropologists be brought on to study the issue.</p> <p>“There will be very big social changes, both for people who work as civil servants, society in general and local residents,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 US pulled diplomatic families as ‘caution’
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/us-evacuated-diplomats-families-ukraine-abundance-caution-acting/story?id=82469392
GIST	<p>The acting U.S. ambassador to Ukraine told ABC News Tuesday that an order for diplomats' families at the embassy to leave the country was issued because Russia could attack "any day now" if it chose.</p> <p>Kristina Kvien, the embassy's charge d'affairs, made the remarks after standing in the bitter cold with a Ukrainian deputy defense minister to receive a 79-ton delivery of American military aid at Kyiv's Boryspil Airport, intended to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia.</p> <p>The U.S. State Department on Sunday ordered diplomats' families to leave and authorized non-emergency staff to depart if they choose, in light of the threat of a possible Russian invasion, as Moscow masses over 100,000 troops near Ukraine's borders. Ukraine's government has criticized the decision, calling it "premature" and "excessively cautious." The United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Germany have since followed suit in various forms, but the majority of European countries have said so far they do not believe such a step is warranted.</p> <p>Kvien told ABC News the decision on the partial evacuation was taken out of an "abundance of caution" given the scale of the Russian build up.</p> <p>"The decision was made because right now Vladimir Putin and Russia have built up such military might on the border that they could take an action any day now," she said. "And with that in mind, we felt that out of an abundance of caution, we had to make sure that our embassy families were safe. So that was the basis for a decision."</p> <p>Kvien said Russia had built up so many troops it "means that Russia could do anything at any moment."</p> <p>"It's like a gun to the head of Ukraine," she said. "And we don't think that Ukraine should have to live with a loaded gun to its head."</p> <p>Ukrainian officials have publicly disagreed with the U.S. assessment that a Russian attack could take place at any moment. A deputy defense minister, Hanna Malyar, on Tuesday said the number of Russian troops at the border currently is "not enough for a full-scale invasion."</p> <p>In general, Ukrainian officials are more skeptical that Russia will really go through with a major attack and in recent days they have become increasingly vocal in contesting the picture coming from the U.S. that an attack is imminent. The head of Ukraine's national security council, Alexey Danilov, on Monday told the BBC that "the number of Russian troops is not increasing in the way many people are presenting it".</p> <p>Ukrainian officials instead have suggested they believe Russia's build up is currently intended to destabilize Ukraine with the threat of attack, including by undermining its economy. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in video addresses has urged Ukrainians not to panic and that the threat of invasion is not worse now than when Russia began the conflict in 2014.</p> <p>Kvien said she believed Ukraine's government views the threat seriously.</p>

	<p>"I do think that President Zelenskyy is taking the threat very seriously, and he is being careful to make preparations as needed," she said.</p> <p>"They've been living with Russian threats for a long time. So I would say that they are just a bit more, 'sang froid' as they say, in French. But that doesn't mean that they don't take them seriously," she said.</p> <p>The U.S. military aid shipment landing on Tuesday was the third to arrive in a week, part of a \$200 million security aid package approved to help Ukraine defend itself and deter Russia.</p> <p>The delivery included 276 Javelin anti-tank missiles, over 800 SMAW-D shoulder-fired "bunker buster" missiles, 170 pounds of 50-caliber ammunition and bomb disposal suits.</p> <p>Kvien said the weapons demonstrated the U.S.' "absolute, rock-solid support" for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.</p> <p>The U.S. is still seeking to avert a Russian attack through diplomacy. Russia has demanded guarantees from the U.S. that Ukraine will never join NATO and that the alliance will pull back forces from eastern European countries that joined after the Cold War.</p> <p>The U.S. has already ruled that out but has proposed discussing other security issues, such as limits on missiles deployments and military exercises.</p> <p>Kvien repeated there are "some areas" that the U.S. is able to talk about with Russia to try to address its concerns, such as "arms control, better transparency in terms of military exercises," but she reiterated that Ukraine's choice to try to join NATO was not on the table. She said she hoped Putin would choose to take the path of diplomacy.</p> <p>"I think that it's the only reasonable path. I think it's the only path that ultimately will lead to a more secure Europe, which Mr. Putin says he would like to have," she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Calif. redwood forest returned to tribes
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/wireStory/california-redwood-forest-returned-native-american-tribes-82473730
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES -- The descendants of Native American tribes on the Northern California coast are reclaiming a bit of their heritage that includes ancient redwoods that have stood since their ancestors walked the land.</p> <p>Save the Redwoods League planned to announce Tuesday that it is transferring more than 500 acres (202 hectares) on the Lost Coast to the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council.</p> <p>The group of 10 tribes that have inhabited the area for thousands of years will be responsible for protecting the land dubbed Tc'ih-Léh-Dũñ, or "Fish Run Place," in the Sinkyone language.</p> <p>Priscilla Hunter, chairwoman of the Sinkyone Council, said it's fitting they will be caretakers of the land where her people were removed or forced to flee before the forest was largely stripped for timber.</p> <p>"It's a real blessing," said Hunter, of the Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians. "It's like a healing for our ancestors. I know our ancestors are happy. This was given to us to protect."</p> <p>The transfer marks a step in the growing Land Back movement to return Indigenous homelands to the descendants of those who lived there for millennia before European settlers arrived.</p> <p>The league first worked with the Sinkyone council when it transferred a 164-acre (66-hectare) plot nearby to the group in 2012.</p>

The league recently paid \$37 million for a scenic 5-mile (8-kilometer) stretch of the rugged and forbidding Lost Coast from a lumber company to protect it from logging and eventually open it up to the public.

Opening access to the public is not a priority on the property being transferred to the tribal group because it is so remote, said Sam Hodder, president and CEO of the league. But it serves an important puzzle piece wedged between other protected areas.

Steep hills rise and fall to a tributary of the Eel River that has steelhead trout and Coho salmon. The property was last logged about 30 years ago and still has a large number of old-growth redwoods, as well as second-growth trees.

“This is a property where you can almost tangibly feel that it is healing, that it is recovering,” Hodder said. “You walk through the forest and, even as you see the kind of ghostly stumps of ancient trees that were harvested, you could also in the foggy landscape see the monsters that were left behind as well as the young redwoods that are sprouting from those stumps.”

The league purchased the land two years ago for \$3.5 million funded by Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to provide habitat for endangered northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet to mitigate other environmental damage by the utility.

PG&E was set to emerge Tuesday from five years of criminal probation for a 2010 explosion triggered by its natural gas lines that blew up a San Bruno neighborhood and killed eight people. It's been blamed since 2017 for sparking more than 30 wildfires that wiped out more than 23,000 homes and businesses and killed more than 100 people.

In an effort to reduce its liability and the chance of vegetation contacting power lines and sparking fires, PG&E has been criticized for destroying many large and old trees.

“Thanks to Save the Redwoods League for seizing on any opportunity to protect lands on the Lost Coast that are vital to its conservation,” said Michael Evenson, vice president of the Lost Coast League, which advocates for protecting water and wildlife in the area. “But PG&E getting a green merit badge after all the destruction they’re doing ... is not palatable.”

Hawk Rosales, former executive director of the council, said the new property adds a significant holding to the 4,000 acres (1,618.7 hectares) the group protects for cultural and ecological purposes.

More importantly, it recognizes the tribal group’s importance in caring for lands.

“For so many decades tribal voices have been marginalized in the mainstream conservation movement,” Rosales said. “It’s only until very recently that they have been invited to participate meaningfully and to take a leadership role.”

Hodder said the league was trying to remove barriers and increase the scale of land managed by tribal communities and return Indigenous knowledge and practices, such as setting small controlled fires to clear out undergrowth that lead to healthier forests.

“These communities have been stewarding these lands across thousands of years,” Hodder said. “It was the exclusion of that stewardship in many ways that’s gotten us into the mess that we’re in.”

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HEADLINE	01/25 Taiwan: athletes but no officials to Olympics
SOURCE	https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3164693/winter-olympics-taiwan-says-no-officials-will-go-beijing-games-athletes

GIST	<p>Taiwan will not send any officials to the Beijing Winter Olympics but its athletes will attend as normal, the government said on Tuesday, adding a call for mainland China not to use politics to “interfere” with the event or “belittle” the island.</p> <p>Taiwan competes in most sporting events including the Olympics as “Chinese Taipei” at the insistence of Beijing, which sees Taiwan as part of one China and inviolable Chinese territory.</p> <p>Relations have plummeted in the past two years or so as Beijing steps up military and diplomatic pressure to assert its territorial claims, including regular air force flights into Taiwan’s air defence zone, with further massed incursions reported by Taiwan this week.</p> <p>In a statement, Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council said the island’s athletes would compete in the Games as normal. At least four have already qualified, according to Taiwan’s Olympic committee.</p> <p>“In addition, considering the limited number of participants and the previous precedent that our side’s officials were often absent, no official representatives will be sent,” it added.</p> <p>Taiwan’s Olympic committee would lead a delegation to mainland China and handle matters related to the Games, the council said.</p> <p>“We call on this year’s organisers to abide by the ‘Olympic Charter’ and not use political factors to interfere with the competition and suppress and belittle our side. Relevant government units will also be prepared to respond to various emergencies,” it added, without elaborating.</p> <p>Authorities in Taipei feared that Beijing could “downgrade” Taiwan’s status by putting its athletes alongside those from the Chinese Special Administrative Region (SAR) of Hong Kong at the opening ceremony, a senior Taiwan official familiar with the matter said.</p> <p>No Taiwanese officials attended the 2008 Beijing Summer Games, although three senior politicians went. Digital Minister Audrey Tang was expected to go to last year’s Tokyo Games, but her trip was cancelled because of Covid-19 concerns.</p> <p>In Taiwan, which has no tradition of winter sports, there is little obvious public interest in the Beijing Winter Games.</p> <p>At the last Winter Games in South Korea in 2018, Taiwan only sent four athletes, none of whom won a medal. Speed skater Huang Yu-ting is Taiwan’s only returning athlete for Beijing.</p> <p>Sub-tropical Taiwan, where snow brushes only the highest mountaintops during the coldest winters, has never won a medal at the Winter Olympics.</p> <p>Taiwan’s best Olympic performance – in August in Tokyo – revived an old debate over whether the island should compete under the name “Taiwan” and saw a surge in pride at being Taiwanese.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/26 NKorea internet hit by 2 nd wave of outages?
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nkorean-internet-downed-by-suspected-cyber-attacks-researchers-2022-01-26/
GIST	SEOUL, Jan 26 (Reuters) - North Korea's internet appears to have been hit by a second wave of outages in as many weeks, possibly caused by a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack, researchers said on Wednesday.

The latest incident took place for about six hours on Wednesday morning local time, and came a day after North Korea conducted its fifth [missile test](#) this month.

Junade Ali, a cybersecurity researcher in Britain who monitors a range of different North Korean web and email servers, said that at the height of the apparent attack, all traffic to and from North Korea was taken down.

"When someone would try to connect to an IP address in North Korea, the internet would literally be unable to route their data into the country," he told Reuters.

Hours later, servers that handle email were accessible, but some individual web servers of institutions such as the Air Koryo airline, North Korea's ministry of foreign affairs, and Naenara, which is the official portal for the North Korean government, continued to experience stress and downtime.

Internet access is strictly limited in North Korea. It is not known how many people there have direct access to the global internet, but estimates generally place the figure at a small fraction of one percent of the population of about 25 million.

Seoul-based NK Pro, a news site that monitors North Korea, reported that log files and network records showed websites on North Korean web domains were largely unreachable because North Korea's Domain Name System (DNS) stopped communicating the routes that data packets should take.

A similar incident was observed on Jan. 14, NK Pro reported.

The simultaneous nature of the server outages suggested a DDoS attack, in which hackers try to flood a network with unusually high volumes of data traffic in order to paralyze it, Ali said.

"It's common for one server to go offline for some periods of time, but these incidents have seen all web properties go offline concurrently. It isn't common to see their entire internet dropped offline."

During the incidents, operational degradation would build up first with network timeouts, then individual servers going offline and then their key routers dropping off the internet, Ali said. "This indicates to me that this is the result of some form of network stress rather than something like a power cut."

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HEADLINE	01/25 Segway hit by Magecart attack
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/segway-magecart-attack-favicon/177971/
GIST	<p>Segway, maker of the iconic – and much-spoofed – personal motorized transporter familiar from guided city tours everywhere, has been serving up a nasty credit-card harvesting skimmer via its website that's likely linked to Magecart Group 12.</p> <p>That's according to Malwarebytes, which noted that "We already have informed Segway so that they can fix their site, but are publishing this blog now in order to raise awareness." Segway, which is now owned by Chinese company Ninebot, did not immediately return a request for confirmation that the site is cleaned.</p> <p>Magecart is a loose umbrella term encompassing various affiliated groups of financially motivated cybercriminals who all employ a similar skimming malware to harvest information – in particular payment-card information – that shoppers enter into checkout pages on eCommerce websites. Magecart 12 is one of the latest iterations of the group, which is known for consistently switching up its tactics.</p> <p>Typically, across Magecart groups, the skimmers are injected into unsuspecting merchant websites by exploiting vulnerable versions of popular eCommerce platforms, such as outdated iterations of Magento or WooCommerce. That's what researchers believe may have happened here.</p>

“While we do not know how Segway’s site was compromised, an attacker will usually target a vulnerability in the CMS itself or one of its plugins,” the team explained, in a [Monday posting](#). “The hostname at store.segway[.]com is running Magento, the popular content management system (CMS) used by many eCommerce sites and also a favorite among Magecart threat actors.”

In terms of this campaign’s specific characteristics, Malwarebytes analysts estimated that the skimmer has been active since about Jan. 6, and that it has so far exposed victims in the United States (which makes up 55 percent of site visitors), Australia (39 percent), Canada (3 percent), the UK (2 percent) and Germany (1 percent).

“The compromise of the Segway store is a reminder that even well-known and trusted brands can be affected by Magecart attacks,” Malwarebytes noted. “While it usually is more difficult for threat actors to breach a large website, the payoff is well worth it.”

Hiding Inside a Favicon

Researchers debugged the skimmer’s loader and was able to reveal its command-and-control (C2) URL, bootstrap[.]com, which is a known skimmer domain that’s been active since November. They also observed a piece of JavaScript, disguised as a file named “Copyright,” which isn’t inherently malicious itself but which dynamically loads the skimmer. The approach means that the skimmer is invisible to anyone inspecting the HTML source code, they explained.

Also of interest is the fact that the threat actors are embedding the skimmer inside a favicon.ico file. Favicons are small icon images that link to other websites.

“If you were to look at it, you’d not notice anything because the image is meant to be preserved,” according to the posting. “However, when you analyze the file with a hex editor, you will notice that it contains JavaScript starting with an eval function.”

Uriel Maimon, senior director of emerging technologies at cybersecurity company PerimeterX, noted that this type of innovation is becoming more common.

“Magecart attackers continue [to] get more creative with their techniques in order to evade detection, especially given advancements in security solutions over the years,” he said via email. “By hiding the skimmer script inside a favicon pretending to display the site’s copyright, neither manual code reviews, static code analysis or scanners could have detected this easily.”

Assume Magecart is Coming After Your eCommerce Site

The skimmer itself is a [known quantity](#), researchers noted – it’s cropped up in campaigns since at least 2020, including those carried out by Magecart 12.

Further, the Magecart cybercriminal group overall has been operating for several years and has skimmed from many large organizations, stealing names, emails, credit-card information and more, all of which sells on the Dark Web for profit. Their activity is vociferous: A recent Risk IQ report in December [found that](#) a Magecart attack on a website happens once every 16 seconds.

Because of all of that, eCommerce merchants should assume they’re being targeted, noted James McQuiggan, security awareness advocate at KnowBe4.

“In this situation, cybercriminals...have about sixteen lines of code injected into the application for credit-card processing,” McQuiggan said via email. “Organizations must monitor web traffic for applications sending data to unknown locations. A robust change-management program to monitor code changes to sites and third-party products can reduce the risk of a successful attack and maintain a solid cyber resiliency.”

	<p>E-commerce businesses could also use a a real-time monitoring solution that detects access to sensitive fields and attempts to exfiltrate personally identifiable information from the client side, PerimeterX's Maimon said.</p> <p>"It is important that users of Magento understand the need to disrupt the web attack lifecycle by stopping the theft of account and identity information from their site, and implement a solution to help do that," he explained. "Taking action before it is too late will also help prevent damage to the brand's reputation as well as limit potential liability for non-compliance."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Tax season: tax scam emails alive and well
SOURCE	https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2022/01/25/tax-scam-emails-are-alive-and-well-as-us-tax-season-starts/
GIST	<p>Many countries have taxation forms with names that have entered the general vocabulary, notably the abbreviations of documents that employers are obliged to provide to their staff to show how much money they were paid – and, most importantly, how much tax was already withheld and paid in on the employee's behalf.</p> <p>In the UK, for example, the form name P45 is often used as a synonym for getting fired, given that it's a final tax summary that you get when you leave a job, willingly or otherwise.</p> <p>In South Africa, you get an IRP5 at the end of the tax year – an archaic term that we are guessing is short for <i>Inland Revenue/Personal, Form #5</i>, even though the South African tax office hasn't been called the Inland Revenue for nearly 25 years.</p> <p>In the USA, the earnings form is a W-2, short for <i>Wages and Tax Statement, Version 2</i>. (It seems that there used to be a form W-1, but it was superseded back in the 1950s.)</p> <p>Here at Naked Security, we know the names of these forms, amongst numerous others, because they often show up in tax scam emails, presumably to give those messages an air of realism.</p> <p>Anyway, given that it's the last week in January, and thus that US tax filing season is about to get underway, we weren't surprised to receive a tax-related scam email today, and to see the W-2 form mentioned explicitly.</p> <p>We were, however, intrigued by the "less is more" nature of today's phishing message: there was no traditional call to action, just a simple request for further information.</p> <p>Phishing without links</p> <p>Usually, when we write about tax scams, we're warning about traditional phishing campaigns where the idea is to trick you into "logging in" to a bogus site where your tax office account details and password get captured by cybercriminals.</p> <p>Sometimes, the crooks use the high-pressure tactic of warning you that you could get into trouble if you don't act right away (and who would willingly undertake a tax office audit?); often, however, the scam relies on the lure of a refund, like this one we received via text message a year ago...</p> <p>But, as regular readers will know, quite a few cybercrime groups are moving away from pure-play "technohacks" these days, such as email scams that rely entirely on you clicking a fake link.</p> <p>Instead, many cybercriminals are adopting the "human led" approach that has served criminals such as advance fee fraudsters and romance scammers so well over the years.</p> <p>Ransomware scammers, for example, used to rely heavily on automatically catching out hundreds or thousands of independent victims at a time by spamming out links or attachments that directly unleashed the ransomware and then demanded somewhere from \$300 to \$1000 from anyone who got hit.</p>

These days, the [human-led approach](#) means that although ransomware criminals still rely on scrambling hundreds or thousands of computers in a [single attack](#), there's rarely any obvious or widespread spam campaign that gives away the attack in advance.

These days, ransomware criminals typically break into (or buy their way into) your network very quietly, and then carefully plan for an attack that's co-ordinated and kicked off manually, at a time to suit the crooks and to disadvantage you.

Similarly, [tech support scammers](#) are increasingly relying on [persuading you to call them](#), rather than bombarding the world with spammy links or phishy attachments and then trying to filter out the people or computers that seem to respond.

Many victims are willing to call the scammers back – they often provide a convenient toll-free number, so it doesn't even cost you anything – because it feels like a low-risk approach.

After all, hackers can't directly push malware onto your computer or inject an exploit into your browser if you're just talking to them.

Of course, the crooks use that to their own advantage, often giving you a level of personal attention and hand-holding that you wish you could get from other IT vendors...

...at which point, the criminals don't need an exploit to run code on your computer, because they'll helpfully and patiently talk you through doing that job all by yourself: they sneakily trick you into creating a cybersecurity problem for yourself under the guise of fixing one.

A little politeness goes a long way

Today's tax scammers have done a "let's ask nicely" job, carefully avoiding links and attachments, and presumably hoping that someone on their mailing list will be willing to reply in the hope of investigating what feels like a new business opportunity:

I actually intend to change cpa for my 2021 tax return, Would like to know if your firm is open to accept new clients for the next tax year, All my documents are completed, all I am yet to have is just my W2. Kindly advise on how to proceed and if I can send forth all the available documents and whats are your fees for individual returns

[REDACTED]

Managing Director

(CPA is short for *Certified Public Accountant*, the US equivalent of what people in many Commonwealth countries refer to as a CA, or *Chartered Accountant*.)

On one hand, the fact that many scammers are avoiding links and attachment these days suggests that we are, as a digital society, learning to be more cautious before blindly believing in unsolicited websites or files.

On the other hand, we need to remember that engaging with a scammer in any way at all is the first step that any cybercrook wants to you take.

What to do?

Not least because it's Data Privacy Week this week, and Data Privacy Day on Friday 28 January 2022, always keep in mind our simplest advice when deciding whether to engage with people you don't already know online:

- Be aware before you share. Every little bit you give away about yourself makes it easier for a scammer to charm you, threaten you, or entice you into an online relationship you didn't ask for in the first place.
- If in doubt, don't give it out. If it feels like a scam, back yourself and assume that it is.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reply is a often good reply. Never feel compelled to reply out of politeness or completeness. It's easier to stay out of a wheedler's clutches if you don't open the door for a reply-to-your-reply. • Listen to friends and family. Especially when money is involved – whether it's you sending it to a romance scammer who falsely claims to love you, or receiving it from newfound “business associates” who have fraudulently pitched you a “job” in their organisation.
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HEADLINE	01/25 Financial sector cyber struggles to worsen?
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/managed-security/cyber-struggles-for-finance-sector-may-get-worse-in-2022
GIST	<p>The past year brought on or exacerbated several trends in IT security facing the U.S. financial industry. Going into the third year of this pandemic, the same cyberthreats are expected to continue and potentially escalate if not checked, according to research from Aite-Novarica Group.</p> <p>IT security is “a difficult and important topic, perhaps the most difficult and exciting issue in the market today,” said John Horn, cybersecurity practice director for Aite-Novarica Group, commenting during a webinar last week on these issues.</p> <p>Ransomware, DataSecOps, zero-trust architectures and managed security have all evolved in recent months, according to Aite-Novarica Group's Top 10 Trends in Cybersecurity 2022: Combating Industrialized Cybercrime Attacks.</p> <p>“We all wish we had a crystal ball,” said Tari Schreider, strategic advisor for Aite-Novarica Group. Financial firms have seen a 1,300% increase in ransomware attacks, according to TrendMicro data cited by Schreider. “When you are facing an army of hackers with nothing better to do, and a strong inclination,” he adds, “it's hard to compete with that.”</p> <p>Ransomware in particular is not only becoming a more common attack on large and small U.S. financial institutions, but it has “become the preferred weapon of choice for nation-state cyber aggressors,” he says, adding that many countries have sanctioned or tacitly support these cyberattacks to make money or to potentially damage the reputation of notable U.S. companies.</p> <p>“They're waging a war against the U.S.,” Schreider continued.</p> <p>And the barrier to entry has decreased, as would-be cyber thieves with even limited skills can now buy a “ransomware-as-a-service” kit on the dark web for less than \$40, Schreider said. Hence, nation-states and other more powerful cyber-aggressors have flooded the field, as Schreider references Donald Rumsfeld's oft-cited insight, “Kinetic war is going to give way to the digital battlefield, dropping bombs is less effective than what people can do.”</p> <p>Schreider also expects that the growing “deluge of data” that complicates security issues for financial service institutions will change how these FSIs use data-focused security platforms. “SIEM platforms are very expensive data repositories,” Schreider said.</p> <p>He added that as security event data continues to grow exponentially, financial firms need to consider how they can better manage this data and pair their SIEM with security orchestration, automation and response architectures. “Too many banks are making their security decisions based on licensing terms rather than their own cyber strategy,” he said.</p> <p>Managed security service providers that support financial institutions are not only having a heyday, they are growing aggressively through acquisition, according to Schreider. “The market is saturated and there is a lot of mergers and acquisitions,” he says. But as this market matures, the demands of their financial industry customers have also evolved. Schreider said that financial firms will be increasingly focused on the outcomes of working with MSSPs, requiring guarantees in regard to security support.</p>

	According to Schreider, banks are saying, “I want to sign and I want the pain to go away.”
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HEADLINE	01/25 Fewer-than-expected Log4j attacks
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/fewer-expected-log4j-attacks-mirai-joins-fray
GIST	<p>Log4Shell, the critical unauthenticated remote code execution vulnerability identified in early December 2021 in the Apache Log4j logging utility, hasn’t seen the mass exploitation that many expected, but an exploit for it is now part of the Mirai botnet’s arsenal, researchers warn.</p> <p>Both cybercriminals and nation-state threat actors have been observed exploiting the security bug – which is tracked as CVE-2021-44228 – in their attacks, including in assaults targeting industrial organizations.</p> <p>Despite that, no mass exploitation of the vulnerability has been observed to date, most likely because the industry jumped into action and took the necessary steps to address or mitigate Log4Shell and the remaining security issues identified in Log4j over the past two months.</p> <p>“As soon as details of the Log4Shell bug became clear, the world’s biggest and most important cloud services, software packages and enterprises took action to steer away from the iceberg, supported by shared threat intelligence and practical guidance from the security community,” Sophos notes.</p> <p>Sophos says it saw a peak of Log4Shell scans between Dec. 20 and Dec. 23, 2021 – its applications were hit more than 600,000 per day –, followed by a drop over the next week. The attacks flattened in January 2022, at around 100,000 daily hits on Sophos’ firewalls.</p> <p>Log4Shell exploitation is different depending on the application that implements Log4j, meaning that threat actors likely performed a large number of redundant scans while attempting to figure out how to exploit each application, Sophos notes.</p> <p>“This doesn’t mean the threat level declined too: by this time, an ever-greater percentage of detections were likely real attacks, with fewer coming from researchers monitoring the latest patching status,” Sophos says.</p> <p>With more threat actors adding exploits to their arsenals, exploitation of the Log4j vulnerabilities is expected to continue.</p> <p>Recently, even malware spreading the Mirai botnet – well known for being used to launch massive distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks – was observed packing code designed to exploit Log4Shell (CVE-2021-44228), Akamai says.</p> <p>However, the exploit appears designed to specifically target devices from Zyxel, which has already confirmed impact from the vulnerability.</p> <p>One of the observed samples was designed to scan for a large number of devices vulnerable to remote code execution, while a second one dropped these functions in favor of Log4j exploitation. The standard Mirai attack functions were still present in it.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 IRS to require new ID verification
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/irs-to-require-new-id-verification/
GIST	<p>American taxpayers will soon be required to sign up with an identity verification company to access their Internal Revenue Service (IRS) accounts online.</p> <p>Currently, those with an online account at IRS.gov online can log in using only their email address and password.</p>

Starting this summer, those accounts will cease to function, and users will have to verify their identity by creating an account with online identity verification service, [ID.me](#).

Based in McLean, Virginia, ID.me requires applicants to prove who they are by uploading a photo of an identity document such as a driver's license, state ID or passport and taking a selfie with a smartphone or a computer with a webcam.

While Americans will not need to make an ID.me account to file a tax return, they will need to register with the new security system to access the Child Tax Credit portal, view previous years' transcripts, get an identity protection PIN, see records of previous payments and view the online payment agreement.

"The IRS emphasizes taxpayers can pay or file their taxes without submitting a selfie or other information to a third-party identity verification company. Tax payments can be made from a bank account, by credit card or by other means without the use of facial recognition technology or registering for an account," [said](#) an IRS spokesperson.

The IRS has received criticism for requiring taxpayers to allow their biometric data to be collected to access their own tax data.

Jackie Singh, director of technology and operations at the Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, [predicted](#) that the new security requirement "will only lead to further ruin for Americans when their data is inevitably breached."

The IRS said the new process would help to ensure that taxpayer information is provided only to the person who has a legal right to the data.

"Identity verification is critical to protect taxpayers and their information. The IRS has been working hard to make improvements in this area, and this new verification process is designed to make IRS online applications as secure as possible for people," [said](#) IRS commissioner Chuck Rettig."

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HEADLINE	01/26 Remote work drives surge insider threats
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/home-working-drives-44-surge-in/
GIST	<p>Insider threats cost organizations an average of over \$15m annually to remediate last year, with stolen credentials a growing risk, according to Proofpoint.</p> <p>The security vendor's 2022 Cost of Insider Threats Global Report was compiled from interviews with over 1000 IT professionals and analysis of more than 6800 incidents across the globe.</p> <p>It revealed that the cost and frequency of insider incidents are on the rise. Associated costs jumped 34%, from \$11.5m in 2020 to \$15.4m in 2021, while the overall volume surged by 44% over the period.</p> <p>The frequency of incidents per company also increased, with 67% of companies experiencing between 21 and more than 40 incidents per year, up from 60% in 2020.</p> <p>Negligence continues to account for the majority (56%) of insider threats, at the cost of nearly \$485,000 per incident.</p> <p>Failure to ensure devices are properly secured or patched and not following corporate security policy are typical issues that have exposed organizations over the past year. They're especially prevalent as many employees now work from home, where it's often harder for IT teams to enforce policy effectively.</p> <p>That's resulted in a near-doubling of credential theft incidents since 2020, at a cost to organizations of \$804,997 per incident.</p>

However, malicious intent is also a major cause of insider threats, accounting for a quarter (26%) of incidents at an average cost of \$648,000 to remediate. Once again, the work-from-home (WFH) mandate has driven this trend, allowing employees more remote access to sensitive data, according to Proofpoint.

Ryan Kalember, EVP of cybersecurity strategy at Proofpoint, described people as the “new perimeter” in the fight against spiraling cyber-risk.

“Months of sustained remote and hybrid working leading up to ‘The Great Resignation’ has resulted in an increased risk around insider threat incidents, as people leave organizations and take data with them,” he argued.

“In addition, organizational insiders, including employees, contractors and third-party vendors, are an attractive attack vector for cyber-criminals due to their far-reaching access to critical systems, data and infrastructure.”

Unfortunately, current efforts to detect insider risk appear to be failing: it now takes an average of 85 days to contain an insider incident, up from 77 days in 2020.

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HEADLINE	01/26 DeadBolt ransomware encrypt NAS devices
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/qnap-warns-of-new-deadbolt-ransomware-encrypting-nas-devices/
GIST	<p>QNAP is warning customers again to secure their Internet-exposed Network Attached Storage (NAS) devices to defend against ongoing and widespread attacks targeting their data with the new DeadBolt ransomware strain.</p> <p>"DeadBolt has been widely targeting all NAS exposed to the Internet without any protection and encrypting users' data for Bitcoin ransom," the company said in a statement issued today.</p> <p>"Your NAS is exposed to the Internet and at high risk if there shows 'The System Administration service can be directly accessible from an external IP address via the following protocols: HTTP' on the dashboard."</p> <p>All QNAP users are urged to "immediately update QTS to the latest available version" to block incoming DeadBolt ransomware attacks.</p> <p>The NAS maker also advises customers to immediately disable Port Forwarding on their router and the UPnP function of the QNAP NAS using the following steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disable the Port Forwarding function of the router: Go to the management interface of your router, check the Virtual Server, NAT, or Port Forwarding settings, and disable the port forwarding setting of NAS management service port (port 8080 and 433 by default).• Disable the UPnP function of the QNAP NAS: Go to myQNAPcloud on the QTS menu, click the "Auto Router Configuration," and unselect "Enable UPnP Port forwarding." <p>You can also use this detailed step-by-step guide to toggle off SSH and Telnet connections, change the system port number and device passwords, and enable IP and account access protection.</p> <p>There is also a DeadBolt ransomware support topic on BleepingComputer's forum with more info on the attacks and with help from other QNAP users.</p> <p>New DeadBolt ransomware surfaces</p> <p>As BleepingComputer reported yesterday, the DeadBolt ransomware group started attacking QNAP users on January 25th, encrypting files on compromised NAS devices and appending a .deadbolt file extension.</p>

The attackers are not dropping ransom notes on encrypted devices but, instead, they are hijacking the login pages to display warning screens saying "WARNING: Your files have been locked by DeadBolt."

The ransom screen asks the victims to pay 0.03 bitcoins (roughly \$1,100) to a unique Bitcoin address generated for each victim, claiming that the decryption key will be sent to the same blockchain address in the OP_RETURN field once the payment goes through.

At the moment, there are no confirmations that the threat actors will actually deliver on their promise to send a working decryption key after paying the ransom.

These ongoing DeadBolt ransomware attacks only impact exposed NAS devices and, given that the attackers also claim to use a zero-day bug, it's advised to disconnect them from the Internet just as QNAP recommended in today's warning.

The DeadBolt gang is also [asking QNAP to pay 50 bitcoins](#) (around \$1.85 million) for the zero-day and a master decryption key to decrypt files for all affected victims.

Today's warning is the third one QNAP issued to alert customers of ransomware attacks targeting their Internet-exposed NAS devices in the last 12 months.

They were previously warned of [eCh0raix ransomware](#) attacks in May and [AgeLocker ransomware](#) attacks in April.

The company also [urged all QNAP NAS users to secure NAS devices exposed to Internet access](#) on January 7th, at the same time alerting them of active ransomware and brute-force attacks.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Nobel Foundation reveals DDoS attack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/nobel-foundation-site-hit-by-ddos-attack-on-award-day/
GIST	<p>The Nobel Foundation and the Norwegian Nobel Institute have disclosed a cyber-attack that unfolded during the award ceremony on December 10, 2021.</p> <p>Nobel is an annual prize awarded to people whose work in physics, chemistry, physiology, medicine, literature, and peace, has been exceptional and is deemed particularly beneficial to humanity.</p> <p>The Nobel prize ceremony is being live-streamed from Oslo and Stockholm, and as such, DDoS attacks can interrupt the video feed and possibly even blemish the prestige of the institution.</p> <p>Nobel prize website targeted by DDoS attack</p> <p>As revealed, the institution's site was hit by a DDoS (distributed denial of service) attack which aims to overwhelm a website with high volumes of "garbage" traffic and a large number of bogus connection requests.</p> <p>This action depletes the available server resources and renders the website unable to serve real visitors, therefore it appears as if it went offline.</p> <p>"The cyberattack subjected the websites to extremely high loads and was designed to try to prevent our ability to update and publish new information about the Nobel Prize and the achievements of the Nobel Laureates," details the official announcement.</p> <p>"The Nobel Foundation and the Norwegian Nobel Institute therefore regard this as a serious attack on the Nobel Prize and have reported it to the police in order to help generate awareness of this type of cyberattack."</p>

	<p>At present, there is no information on who could be behind this cyberattack, but there are several potential candidates.</p> <p>Potential state-actor involvement</p> <p>The Nobel Foundation has been repeatedly criticized for bias and favoritism, accused of maintaining an unfair stance against scientists from specific countries.</p> <p>For example, China, a country of 1.4 billion people, has received the prize only eight times, India has won it 12 times, Russia has had 32 winners, and Japan only 29.</p> <p>On the other hand, individuals from the United States have been awarded 398 times, the UK received 137 Nobel prizes, Germany got the award 111 times, and France has had 70 winners.</p> <p>Additionally, the Nobel prize-awarding committee has been criticized for excluding researchers who had key contributions in awarded studies or ignoring pioneering discoveries to award relatively minor findings.</p> <p>As such, given the political controversy behind some of the accolades awarded by the otherwise highly regarded Nobel Foundation, the involvement of a state-supported actor in these attacks would not be surprising.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 DazzleSpy malware targets macOS users
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-dazzlespy-malware-targets-macos-users-in-watering-hole-attack/
GIST	<p>A new watering hole attack has been discovered targeting macOS users and visitors of a pro-democracy radio station website in Hong Kong and infecting them with the DazzleSpy malware.</p> <p>As detailed by researchers at ESET who have been investigating the campaign, it's part of the same operation that Google's Project Zero disclosed two weeks ago, which leveraged Chrome and Windows zero-days to hack into Windows and Android devices.</p> <p>ESET's report instead focuses on the exploitation of a WebKit flaw in the Safari web browser, essentially adding the final piece in the puzzle and confirming that the campaign targeted all major platforms.</p> <p>Watering hole attacks involve the infection of a legitimate website with malware, targeting the demographic of that site, and in some cases, only specific IP addresses.</p> <p>Targeting activists</p> <p>Based on the websites used to propagate the exploits, the campaign targets freedom of speech advocates, independence, and political activists.</p> <p>The central Chinese administration has been restricting political rights and special privileges enjoyed by citizens of Hong Kong in recent years, and allegations of spying activists have been abundant.</p> <p>This is not the first time the Chinese state has been accused of conducting aggressive surveillance against minorities by using malware deployed through watering hole attacks.</p> <p>In this case, one of the websites that dropped exploits to unsuspecting victims is that of the D100 internet radio, a pro-democracy station that fosters anti-Beijing sentiments.</p> <p>The other example is a fake website that attempted to lure liberation activists using the "fightforhk[.]com" domain that was only registered in October 2021.</p> <p>The macOS exploit chain</p>

Both of these websites, and possibly more, feature a malicious iframe that points to a domain that checks the macOS version and redirects to the next stage, which loads the exploit JavaScript code.

The exploit targets [CVE-2021-1789](#), an arbitrary code execution flaw triggered when processing web content and affects Safari versions below 14.1.

"The exploit relies on a side effect caused by modifying an object property to be accessible via a "getter" function while enumerating the object's properties in JIT-compiled code," explains [ESET's report](#).

"The JavaScript engine erroneously speculates that the value of the property is cached in an array and is not the result of calling the getter function."

The exploit implements two primitives ('addrof' and 'fakeobj') to gain memory read and write access, while it also contains code that helps bypass mitigations like 'Gigacage' and loads the next stage.

The next step is a privilege escalation to root, taking place through a Mach-O file loaded into memory and executed.

The vulnerability exploited to achieve privilege escalation is [CVE-2021-30869](#), which enables an app to execute arbitrary code with kernel privileges.

DazzleSpy

The final step in the process is to drop DazzleSpy, a feature-rich backdoor that includes a wide range of malicious capabilities.

DazzleSpy establishes persistence on the compromised system by adding a new Property List file to the 'LaunchAgents' folder. Its executable hides in \$HOME/.local/ under the misleading name 'softwareupdate'.

The malware features a hardcoded C2 server address and can accept several commands from it, with the most important being:

- info – Collect system information like IP address and Wi-Fi SSID.
- ScanFiles – Enumerate files in Desktop, Downloads, and Documents folders
- cmd – Execute shell command
- RDP – Start a remote screen session
- downloadFile – Exfiltrate a file from the system
- processInfo – Enumerate running processes
- acceptFile – Writes a file to disk

ESET comments that the DazzleSpy contains several artifacts resulting from sloppy code writing and disregard for operational security.

There are plenty of clues that point to the backdoor's origin, like the internal error messages, which are written in Chinese, and the conversion of the exfiltrated timestamps to the China Standard Time zone before reaching the C2.

Finally, DazzleSpy features end-to-end encryption in its communications, and if a middle-man inserts a TLS-inspection proxy in-between, it stops sending data to the C2.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Experts fear more serious IoT attacks
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/iot/as-iot-attacks-increase-experts-fear-more-serious-threats
GIST	With attacks against Internet of Things devices on the rise, threat researchers are warning companies to make sure they know their devices and have processes in place to maintain and defend them.

In a Jan. 25 blog post, threat intelligence firm Intel 471 stated a surge of attacks on IoT devices in 2020 and 2021 led to the theft of confidential information and creation of massive botnets for launching distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. The company also saw main malware codebases Mirai and Gafgyt being used to compromise connected devices, with variants of Mirai the most popular way to sell illicit access to targeted firms on underground forums.

The threat will only grow this year as attackers shift to more profit-focused motives, says Michael DeBolt, chief intelligence officer for Intel 471.

"As IoT devices become more and more commonplace, and industries increase their dependency on these devices for their uptime and operations ... we expect to see the shift to targeted ransomware and IoT botnet operators working with access merchants to identify potential targets," he says.

Two trends in the IoT marketplace are converging to create a significant security problem. Manufacturers of a plethora of devices are adding connected functionality for management and updates, as well as to offer additional services, leading to a larger attack surface area in most organizations. However, management of these devices has not kept pace, leaving many of them vulnerable to attack.

In the medical space, for example, 53% of connected medical devices and other IoT devices in healthcare settings have critical vulnerabilities, according to a Jan. 20 report from Cynerio. Intravenous pumps and patient monitors are the most common connected devices in hospitals, accounting for 57% of IoT devices in the average medical setting.

The level of vulnerability in the medical industry means that hospitals and healthcare organizations have to go beyond having visibility into their current attack surface, according to the report. They must also be able to effectively respond.

"Hospitals don't need more data — they need to be able to act decisively when attacked," according to [Cynerio's report](#). "Identifying and addressing risk vectors that are already being leveraged in the wild is a good first step towards implementing healthcare IoT security that will make a hospital's connected device footprint more resilient."

The codebase for the Mirai botnet continues to be a staple of online attackers, Intel 471's DeBolt says. [Mirai is most recognized as the malware](#) used to compromise Internet-connected digital video recorders (DVRs) and routers in 2016 and cause them to attack websites and network providers. Six years later, malware developers continue to extend the functionality of the Mirai codebase, using compromised systems as a way to anonymize traffic as well as send floods of packets at targeted networks, [Intel 471 stated in its blog post](#).

"The takeaway is that Mirai is still alive," says DeBolt. "It's not going anywhere and it is still kicking."

Vulnerabilities in IoT devices extend far beyond home routers and consumer products. Because many of these connected devices are based on the same operating systems — such as Linux or Wind River System's VxWorks — a variety of medical devices, manufacturing controllers, and monitoring systems, to name a few, are also routinely found to have vulnerabilities.

"While people hear IoT and automatically think of smart devices — think home appliances with internet connection — that's not really where the big, primary threat is," DeBolt says. "The vulnerabilities lie in the software development kits, operating systems and/or firmware that power the hardware that makes all these smart devices connect to the internet."

Because of the sensitive nature of many of these connected devices, Intel 471 argues that IoT ransomware is likely to be the next stop for attackers. An attack on IoT controllers or monitoring devices could easily lead to a halt of operations at utilities, hospitals, or within smart buildings and city infrastructure, lending any ransom demand that much more weight.

	<p>Currently, the company has not seen much chatter among underground actors that indicate ransomware functionality is being integrated into current codebases, but given the seriousness of the issue, defenders should be thinking about it now, says DeBolt.</p> <p>"We are not seeing the underground actors wholly going to IoT as a ransomware target," he adds, "but if you are in IoT security, you should be worried about ransomware."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Attackers use Microsoft OneDrive for C2
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/threat-actors-use-microsoft-onedrive-for-command-and-control-in-attack-campaign
GIST	<p>In what's believed to be the first known use of the tactic, an advanced persistent threat actor is leveraging Microsoft OneDrive services for command-and-control (C2) purposes in a sophisticated cyberespionage campaign aimed at high-ranking government and defense industry officials of a West Asian nation.</p> <p>Researchers from Trellix who have been tracking the campaign have attributed it with a low to moderate degree of confidence to APT28, aka Fancy Bear, a threat actor that the US government previously has linked to Russia's military intelligence service. Trellix's analysis of data related to the campaign shows that the threat actors also have their sights on defense and government entities in Poland and other Eastern European nations.</p> <p>The infection chain for the multistage, likely APT28 campaign that Trellix observed began like many other APT campaigns — with the execution of a malicious Excel file likely sent to the target via a phishing email. The file contained an exploit for CVE-2021-40444, a critical remote code execution vulnerability in MSHTML or "Trident," Microsoft's proprietary browser engine. The vulnerability was a zero-day flaw — meaning no patch was available for it — when Microsoft disclosed it last September amid reports of active exploit activity.</p> <p>The threat actor's exploit for the MSHTML flaw resulted in a malicious dynamic link library (DLL) file executing in the compromised system's memory and downloading a third-stage malware component that Trellix has dubbed "Graphite." The security vendor's analysis of Graphite showed it to be using Microsoft OneDrive accounts as a C2 server via the Microsoft Graph API — a Web application programming interface for accessing Microsoft Cloud services.</p> <p>Trellix found the Graphite malware itself was a DLL executable based on the Empire open source, post-exploitation remote administration framework and designed to run entirely in memory and never written to disk. The malware was part of a multistage infection chain that finally resulted in an Empire agent being downloaded on the comprised system and being used to control it remotely.</p> <p>Christiaan Beek, lead scientist at Trellix, says the threat actor's new C2 mechanism using a cloud service was an interesting move and something the company's researchers have not observed before. "Using Microsoft OneDrive as a command-and-control server mechanism was a surprise, a novel way of quickly interacting with the infected machines," he says.</p> <p>The tactic allowed attackers to drag encrypted commands into the victim's folders. OneDrive would then sync with the victim's machines and the encrypted commands would be executed, after which any requested information would be encrypted and sent back to the OneDrive of the attacker, Beek says.</p> <p>Ties to Russia's APT28</p> <p>The multistage attack and the way it was executed was designed to make it hard for defenders to spot what was going on. Even so, organizations with properly configured detection systems should be able to spot malicious activity. "Although all kinds of living-off-the-land techniques are being used to stay below the radar, attackers need to communicate with systems internally and execute commands that should trigger properly configured XDR technology," Beek says.</p>

	<p>Lure documents and other telemetry associated with the APT28 campaign showed the attacker was interested in government and military targets. One document for instance was named "parliament_rew.xlsx" and appears to have been aimed at employees working for the government of the targeted country. Another had a name and contained text pertaining to military budgets for 2022 and 2023.</p> <p>Trellix's researchers were able to identify two host computers that were used in APT28's attacks. One of the hosts had an IP address that resolved to Serbia while the other appeared to be based in Sweden. Trellix found the C2 server with the Serbian IP address was used to host the exploit for the MSHTML vulnerability and installation data for the second-stage DLL. The server in Sweden, meanwhile, served as a host for the Empire server framework for remotely controlling agents installed in compromised systems.</p> <p>Trellix's analysis shows that preparations for the attack began in July 2021 and the attacks themselves happened between September and November 2021. The timing of the campaign coincided with a period of political tensions around the Armenian and Azerbaijani border, which means the attacks were likely geopolitically motivated, Trellix said. The security vendor said it has informed victims of the attacks and provided information to them on how to remove all known attack components from their network.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Sneaky ransomware targets Linux servers
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/this-sneaky-ransomware-is-now-targeting-linux-servers-too/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>One of the most prolific families of ransomware now has additional Linux and VMware ESXi variants that have been spotted actively targeting organisations in recent months.</p> <p>Analysis by cybersecurity researchers at Trend Micro identified LockBit Linux-ESXi Locker version 1.0 being advertised on an underground forum. Previously, LockBit ransomware – which was by far the most active ransomware family at one point last year – was focused on Windows.</p> <p>LockBit has a reputation as one of the most sneaky forms of ransomware. And now the Linux and VMware ESXi variant means that the ransomware could potentially spread itself even further, encrypting a wider variety of servers and files – and driving up the pressure for a victim to give in and pay a ransom for the decryption key.</p> <p>"The release of this variant is in line with how modern ransomware groups have been shifting their efforts to target and encrypt Linux hosts such as ESXi servers," said Junestherry Dela Cruz, threats analyst at Trend Micro.</p> <p>"An ESXi server typically hosts multiple VMs, which in turn hold important data or services for an organization. The successful encryption by ransomware of ESXi servers could therefore have a large impact on targeted companies."</p> <p>By targeting Linux, LockBit is following in the footsteps of other ransomware groups, including REvil and DarkSide, but the popularity of LockBit ransomware-as-a-service means that attacks could have a much wider impact and organisations should be aware of the potential threat.</p> <p>Like many other ransomware attacks, LockBit steals information from compromised networks and threatens to publish it if the ransom isn't received – and that ransom demand can amount to millions of dollars.</p> <p>As with previous versions of LockBit, the Linux variant features a note from the attackers that attempts to lure people into handing over corporate account details to further spread ransomware, in exchange for a cut of the profits – although it's unclear if attempting to attract insiders to give up secrets in this way actually works.</p> <p>Researchers suggest that ransomware is harder to detect on Linux, but that implementing best security practices still provides the best chance of preventing the network from falling victim to an attack.</p>

	This includes keeping systems up to date with the latest security patches to prevent intrusions, especially as LockBit is known to exploit vulnerable servers to help it spread. Those behind LockBit attacks have also been known to exploit stolen usernames and passwords, so if it's known that a password has been part of a data breach, it should be changed.
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HEADLINE	01/25 Beware of fake tax apps pushing malware
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/01/25/fake-tax-apps/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>With the self-assessment tax deadline fast approaching in the UK, self-employed individuals will be looking to take advantage of the many apps that are on the market to help make the tax return process as smooth as possible. Unfortunately, there is a real and pervasive problem of tax-related cybercrime.</p> <p>It is not uncommon for cyber scams to be tied to current affairs, as this ensures that they are far-reaching and timely. When it comes to apps, for every good and useful app that exists, there will nearly always be malicious individuals looking to exploit its popularity to try to steal from unsuspecting individuals.</p> <p>Education among end-users has come a long way in the last decade. With the rise of malware, there has also been a rise in user awareness. But it's simply not possible for the general public to be well versed in all the potential threats that exist and arise. For example, users may have their guard up when it comes to suspicious hyperlinks, emails, and websites, but many let their guard down when it comes to malware in the form of applications.</p> <p>Masquerading as legitimate apps, these programs are designed to harvest user data and facilitate identity theft and payment redirection. Often these fake apps are published on third-party app stores, outside of those natively available from the device manufacturer (e.g., the Google Play Store on Android or the App Store on iOS). However, some occasionally make it onto these first-party app stores as well.</p> <p>A game of stealth</p> <p>When it comes to fake tax apps, for example, the crooks' main approach is sleight of hand. In many cases, bad actors will reverse engineer legitimate apps, add malicious code to it, and then upload the package on app stores. If the attacker or attack group are good, the app will appear to be the real deal and will function in the same way but will also covertly function as a platform to launch wider malware attacks on a phone or desktop.</p> <p>Threat actors commonly code these fake tax apps to use the official filing APIs used by legitimate apps. In part, this is to try to maximize their longevity on whichever app store they are on. By using these APIs, the malicious apps may help users to file their tax returns but they may also use privilege escalation mechanisms to copy sensitive information to criminal databases. Hiding in the background of what seems to be a legitimate app, bad actors could, for example, process payment requests where the payee details are that of a criminal organization or threat actor, rather than the intended recipient (in this case, the tax authorities).</p> <p>Another example of malicious activity might include requesting access to the camera roll and then scanning images for any documents that might include personally identifiable information (PII), such as a passport or driving license, which can be used to facilitate identity theft. Many of these apps may also carry out keystroke logging: the app may request to install a custom keyboard that looks identical to the system keyboard and then use it to harvest sensitive data – such as private messages, passwords, and even credit card details – entered into other apps.</p> <p>In the last five years, several vulnerabilities have been discovered within the Android and Apple operating systems that threat actors exploit to steal information via fake apps. In 2019 and 2020, two major Android vulnerabilities – dubbed Strandhogg and Strandhogg 2.0 – allowed, among other things, fake apps to masquerade as legitimate ones, meaning that attackers could gain access to people's private information and services, including bank accounts, camera, photos, and messages. These privilege escalation</p>

vulnerabilities are classic examples of how bad actors can use malware to imitate legitimate apps and siphon off sensitive data.

Mitigating risk

Apple and Google should better police their app stores, but some responsibility for risk mitigation must also lie with the end user. Anyone looking to use an app to help file their taxes must be vigilant. While some apps have slipped through Apple's and Google's safety net in the past, as a rule, it's much better to download an app from there than from a third-party app store.

Legitimate app publishers could also do more to ensure that their apps aren't reverse engineered, tampered with, and republished by criminals. Certainly, any app that takes payments ought to have its own integrity controls in place. The increased use of in-app protection tools has paved the way for developers to mitigate the devastating consequences that cyber attacks on these apps can have.

In any case, users should always double-check and download apps from respected developers and should always remain cautious. The phrase "trust your gut" springs to mind. If an application requests far too many permissions, such as to access the camera, record audio, install keyboards, or to download data and change settings, these should be red flags, especially if they have nothing to do with the apparent functionality of the app.

Additionally, real apps (or at least the good ones) will offer added security features such as [multi-factor authentication](#) and/or, where applicable, [biometric authentication](#). Those looking to utilize apps to help with their taxes should be on high alert for those exhibiting suspicious behavior. There are plenty of legitimate apps to use and the consequences of accidentally using a fake app could be far worse than missing the tax return deadline.

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HEADLINE	01/25 TianySpy malware uses smishing message
SOURCE	https://www.trendmicro.com/en_us/research/22/a/tianyspy-malware-uses-smishing-disguised-as-message-from-telco.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>It has been some time since SMS or text messaging has become a means to spread mobile malware. In September 2021, Trend Micro confirmed a new mobile malware infection chain targeting both Android and iPhone devices. The chain is triggered by a smishing message that appears to be sent from a telecommunications company. It is surmised that the malware might have been designed to steal credentials associated with membership websites of major Japanese telecommunication services.</p> <p>This is the first case confirmed by Trend Micro wherein an iPhone device was the target of a malware infection triggered by smishing, as Android devices have always been the main target in all other cases. This is a noteworthy cyberthreat, considering that the Japan Cybercrime Control Center (JC3) also published a similar alert.</p> <p>Infection chain</p> <p>This campaign was confirmed as active between September 30 and October 12, 2021. The smishing message, which was disguised as coming from a telecommunications company, contains a link to a malicious website. In turn, the website contains instructions to install what appears to be security software but is actually malware. Trend Micro confirmed two patterns of the message spread in this campaign.</p> <p>In the first pattern, TianySpy was confirmed to be infected in cases where users accessed the malicious link from both Android and iPhone devices. In the second pattern, users of Android devices were lured into accessing the malicious link, resulting in their devices being infected with KeepSpy. In the same pattern, users of iPhones who accessed the malicious link were infected with the version of TianySpy for their device.</p> <p>The configuration profile in an iPhone is a function that can be used to define configuration for various functions of the device, including the Wi-Fi setting. In this campaign, users were lured into downloading</p>

and installing a malicious configuration profile upon accessing a link in a smishing message sent to their iPhone. Research from Trend Micro has confirmed that device information, such as the Unique Device Identifier (UDID), is sent to the attacker's site when the malicious configuration profile is installed.

The sent UDID is then used in a provisioning profile, which has TianySpy built in. This enables TianySpy to infect an iPhone through Ad Hoc distribution, which is usually used to deploy an application in its development stage.

Malware analysis

From the results of our analysis of TianySpy (Android version), we determined that the malware has the following functions:

- **Reading Wi-Fi settings**
- **Falsifying a legitimate telecommunication company's site, specifically its usage statement via WebView (via Application Web display system for Android)**
- **Information stealing through a malicious JavaScript**
- **Sending stolen data by mail**
- **Displaying a malicious or fake site**

TianySpy first checks Wi-Fi settings and then displays an alert message inducing the user to turn off the Wi-Fi, if enabled. If the Wi-Fi is disabled, an authentication page (authentication is required prior to displaying the usage statement page) is shown and credential information and authorized cookies are sent to the attacker's email address. During this process, the Wi-Fi is likely disabled, as the attacker wants to collect credentials over a carrier network.

Relation with phishing group targeting local banks in Japan

[The Cyber Security Institute](#) at Trend Micro collaborated with JC3 and its members to research and analyze a phishing group targeting domestic banks in Japan. The [results](#) of this collaboration were reported in April 2021. Trend Micro also [reported](#) notable characteristics of BP1 and BP6, the two largest banking phishing groups identified in the project.

As mentioned earlier, some text messages seen in this campaign contained links to lure users into installing security software. In reality, however, users would end up unknowingly infecting their device with the Android malware KeepSpy. It has also been confirmed that when accessed via an iPhone outside of the observed campaign period (September 30 to October 12, 2021), these phishing sites appear as websites for a telecommunication company and are categorized under the BP1 group.

This is the first case in Japan where a type of malware that targets iPhones resulted in financial damage. This campaign shows that iPhones can indeed be infected by malware once a malicious configuration profile is installed. This case also confirmed that simply accessing a malicious website would not inevitably infect a device with malware. Rather, a user has to complete the process of installing the malware for infection to take place. This means that with enough knowledge and caution, a user can protect their device from infection.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Russia arrests 'Infraud Organization' leader
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/russia-arrests-leader-of-infraud-organization-hacker-group/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and law enforcement have arrested Andrey Sergeevich Novak, the alleged leader of the Infraud Organization, a hacker group that caused losses of more than \$560 million in seven years of activity.</p> <p>The arrest was possible due to intelligence collected by Russian special services and with the cooperation of U.S. law enforcement.</p>

The Infraud Organization was involved in acquiring and trading stolen payment card data and identities on the Infraud carding portal.

In 2018, an international law enforcement operation [disrupted the organization](#) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) indicted 36 suspects. Of these, 13 were arrested in various countries, including one of the portal's administrators.

Four suspected Infraud members detained

Last week, the FSB and law enforcement in Russia arrested four individuals, Andrey Novak among them, who is believed to be the founder of Infraud Organization operating under the aliases "Unicc," "Faaxxx," and "Faxtrod."

Novak has been detained for two months, while the investigation clarifies his role in the hacking group. The other three alleged members - Kirill Samokutyaev, Konstantin Vladimirovich Bergman, and Mark Avramovich Bergman, have been placed under house arrest, Russian News Agency [TASS reports](#).

The agency quotes an undisclosed source saying that Novak is the alleged founder of the criminal group. A graphic from the DoJ of the hierarchy within the Infraud Organization, however, shows Novak listed as a vendor on the portal, well below the higher echelon of administrators and super moderators.

The investigation into Infraud activities is ongoing and continues to identify new members of the group. The list of arrests has expanded and some individuals have pleaded guilty and received a sentence.

Infraud co-founder Sergey Medvedev (a.k.a. "Stells," "segmed," and "serjbear") [admitted](#) his role in the operation in June 2020 and on March 19, 2021, was [sentenced to 10 years](#) in prison for one count of racketeering conspiracy. Another member of the group, Marko Leopard, aka "Leopardmk," received five years of prison time for offering bulletproof hosting services to Infraud members.

Russia takes action against its cybercriminals

Russia appears to have started collaborating with the U.S. and taking active measures against cybercriminals on its territory.

Earlier this month, the FSB announced that it [shut down the REvil ransomware gang](#), following reports from U.S. authorities on the leader of the group. At least eight suspects have been [charged and detained](#) for two months.

These raids and arrests come after [multiple warnings](#) that the U.S. would take action against threat actors in Russia if the Russian government can't or won't.

Russian citizens found guilty of cybercriminal activities will serve their sentence in Russia, even if they are wanted in other countries because the country's legislation forbids extraditing them.

However, non-Russian citizens will be extradited to a foreign state after an investigation and court proceedings in Russia.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Crypto collapse erases \$1.35 trillion wealth
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/01/25/crypto-collapse-regulations/
GIST	<p>By the end of last year, the value of Hasten Carter's cryptocurrency holdings had climbed to about \$250,000. He moved to a nicer apartment, bought a new truck, and started thinking about pursuing his dream of a full-time career in game development.</p> <p>But over the past two months, the value of cryptocurrencies has plummeted, taking with it much of Carter's digital nest egg, a mix of Ethereum, the second-most popular cryptocurrency, and a number of more obscure coins.</p>

“It’s gotten out of hand to the point where I’m not sure I’m comfortable I can keep my money,” said Carter, 30, who has kept his day job at a Nashville sign-making business. Of his hopes for a new career, he said: “I’m not sure if it’s as wise of a decision.”

Thousands of Americans who jumped into crypto investing over the past two years in hopes of a rocket ride to instant wealth now face a similar reckoning: Prices for cryptocurrencies — from relative stalwarts such as bitcoin and Ethereum to more exotic tokens — have cratered since reaching all-time highs in early November, wiping out an astonishing \$1.35 trillion in value globally, nearly half of the total market, according to CoinMarketCap.

The slide has accelerated over the past week as investors have fled riskier bets for safer harbors. The “crypto crash” has put pressure on Washington regulators to impose stricter rules on the industry — and raised fresh questions about the dangers of cryptocurrency for the average investor.

“You’re going to get more people calling their elected representatives, generally unhappy about crypto or feeling they were wronged in some way,” said Ian Katz, managing director of Capital Alpha Partners, a Washington policy analysis firm. “All regulators and members of Congress want to appear to be alert behind the wheel, and if this turns out to be a continued bloodbath, it increases the impetus for action.”

The plunge in crypto prices has tracked a stock market sell-off that has seen the broad-based S&P 500 shed about 8 percent of its value this year, as investors brace for interest rate hikes from the Federal Reserve and potentially underwhelming corporate earnings.

Yet both the crypto and stock markets are attempting to claw back some of their recent losses. Bitcoin, which was trading below \$33,000 on Monday morning, recovered to around \$37,000 on Tuesday afternoon. And after two days of wild swings, the S&P 500 and the Dow Jones industrial average stood at their levels at the start of the week.

In the meantime, the crypto swoon is hitting celebrities and everyday investors alike. A number of star athletes have entered into promotional deals with crypto companies that involve converting at least part of their salaries into digital assets. Los Angeles Rams wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. announced in late November he would be converting \$750,000 of his 2021 pay into bitcoin as part of an agreement with the payment service Cash App.

If Beckham converted that amount in a lump sum at the time, it could be worth as little as \$35,000 now, after factoring in bitcoin’s slide and his tax burden on the original payment, according to Action Network analyst Darren Rovell.

The industry’s surge has drawn in a widening circle of Americans: One in 6 now say they have invested in, traded or otherwise used cryptocurrency, according to a recent Pew Research Center study. And that pool is increasingly diverse. Forty-four percent of those who have bought or traded crypto in the past year are non-White, and 35 percent have annual household incomes below \$60,000, according to a poll over the summer by NORC at the University of Chicago.

Many crypto holders remain undeterred. Relative veterans point to their experience holding on through a crash in prices in late 2017 and early 2018 that investors now call the “crypto winter” — and the dramatic rally that followed it. They say recent price fluctuations have not shaken their faith in the technology’s long-term value, bidding farewell to new investors with a kind of “so long, leaves more for the rest of us” élan.

“Goodbye to all the nonbelievers,” David Hoffman, co-owner of Bankless, tweeted on Saturday, as prices continued to plummet.

In an interview with The Post, Hoffman, whose company hosts a newsletter, podcast and Discord group about crypto, said his circle of friends, which formed during the crash four years ago, almost feel more comfortable in a down cycle.

“We were all born in the bear market, so finally we’re back home,” he said, noting Ethereum is now worth \$2,400, “and last time it was \$80.”

“Obviously no one is happy to see their portfolio shrink 40 percent in seven days, but it’s really a matter of: Do you believe crypto is going to be the dominant financial platform of the future?” Hoffman said.

Likewise, newly wealthy crypto holders who moved to Puerto Rico in the past year to take advantage of tax breaks on crypto investments have not seen much impact from recent price fluctuations, said George Burke, a tax break beneficiary who moved to the island last May.

“The crypto people here are likely long-term holders. Many, like me, have been in the space for years and seen multiple price cycles. No need for any of us to panic sell. We’ve seen it before,” said Burke, co-founder and chief marketing officer of Portal, a peer-to-peer cryptocurrency trading platform incorporated in Delaware.

Portal did consider the market moves in deciding whether to go forward with its planned public sale, since “public sentiment and investor contributions” are closely tied to the price of bitcoin, said Burke, whose company has four team members based on the island. Ultimately, they decided to move forward.

“I personally think this slump is very temporary,” he said.

Nonetheless, the crash is resonating in Washington, where White House officials are working to better coordinate what has been a fractured approach to crypto from federal agencies haggling over how to regulate the new asset class.

White House officials plan to release as soon as this month a memorandum that people familiar with the matter said would span numerous topics related to cryptocurrencies. Those include White House guidance surrounding a central bank digital currency, a form of digital cash that would be backed by the Federal Reserve and could compete with some privately issued cryptocurrencies. The White House is also expected to weigh in on the impact of crypto on the stability of financial markets and the need to sync regulations of digital currencies with other countries that may have different approaches.

The White House effort — ongoing since last summer but first made public in a Bloomberg News report — is not expected to contain significant policy recommendations. But it is likely to designate further action to parts of the federal government, including the Treasury Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission. The White House memorandum is expected to be produced by the National Security Council.

“The White House wants to send the clear message it is fostering a coordinated approach related to cryptocurrencies rather than a scattershot approach from the regulatory agencies,” one person familiar with the matter said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss an administration matter not yet made public. “They’re going to use the document to set up a framework for different agencies to start working on different assets important to both financial stability and national security.”

But regulators focused on the industry aren’t waiting to press ahead. Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Gary Gensler, arguably the administration’s most aggressive advocate for tougher oversight, last week said his agency is eyeing new rules for crypto trading platforms. Without them in place, “it’d be another year of the public being vulnerable,” he said in a virtual roundtable with reporters.

The SEC has taken 97 enforcement actions against industry players since 2013, including 24 last year, according to Cornerstone Research.

Jose Santana Torres, a taxi driver who began trading cryptocurrency around 2018, after accepting payment for rides in bitcoin, said he felt insulated from volatile market shifts because he moved valuable holdings in bitcoin and Ether into Tether, a “stablecoin” that claimed to be backed by an equivalent amount of U.S.

	dollars. The company was ordered to pay a \$41 million fine to the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission in October to settle allegations that the claim was misleading.
	“Still holding it for the next bull run. ... Not a big deal for me,” he said.
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	01/25 Suspected militants attack in eastern Congo
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/suspected-islamists-kill-least-12-eastern-congo-attacks-villages-2022-01-25/
GIST	<p>KINSHASA, Jan 25 (Reuters) - Suspected Islamist militants have killed at least 12 civilians and burned houses and motorbikes during raids on two villages in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, two local human rights groups said on Wednesday.</p> <p>Fighters believed to be from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan militia active in eastern Congo since the 1990s, attacked the villages of Mutuheyi and Mapendo in Ituri province on Sunday night, the activists said.</p> <p>Since launching a joint military operation against the ADF in November, Congo and Uganda claim to have captured several of the ADF's jungle camps, but the militia's attacks on civilians have not stopped.</p> <p>Christophe Munyanderu, head of a local rights group, said the attackers came from bases in nearby North Kivu province and killed the 13 people, burned four motorbikes and torched six houses.</p> <p>Patrick Musubao, president of another rights group, said 12 people had been killed. He said the victims were shot or butchered with bladed weapons.</p> <p>He warned authorities of the presence of the ADF in the area before the attack but had no response, he said.</p> <p>"Now a dozen people have just been innocently killed," Musubao told Reuters.</p> <p>Army spokesman Jules Ngongo Tshikudi confirmed an attack had taken place in the villages but did not give a death toll or say who was responsible. He said soldiers could do nothing to stop the attack.</p> <p>"The army has had no warning. What is important here is to impose peace in this area and the army will not rest," he said.</p> <p>No group has taken responsibility for the killings. The ADF does not have a spokesperson and does not usually comment on its operations.</p> <p>The ADF pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in mid-2019. Islamic State has in turn claimed responsibility for some of the ADF's violence, including bombings in Uganda and Congo late last year.</p> <p>United Nations researchers, however, have found no evidence of IS command and control over the group's operations.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 Turkey tosses ISIS deputy emir conviction
SOURCE	https://nordicmonitor.com/2022/01/turkey-overturns-conviction-of-isis-deputy-emir-who-is-wanted-by-spain/
GIST	Turkey's top appeals court threw out the conviction of an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militant who was wanted by Spain, citing a lack of documentation during his trial at the court of first instance.

The suspect, whose name was withheld by the court, was convicted in a high criminal court and sentenced to prison on February 7, 2020. Spain wanted the person on terrorism charges and informed Turkey of his role as deputy to an ISIS emir. Turkish police also submitted documentation that amounted to criminal evidence against the suspect.

The conviction was upheld by a regional appeals court. However, Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals (Yargıtay) on October 5, 2021 overturned the conviction and asked Turkish authorities to seek more information from Spain under the 1959 European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters.

The 1959 convention entered into force in 1963 and has thus far been ratified by 50 states including three non-European nations. The agreement was upgraded in 1978 with the Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters and later with the Second Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters in 2001.

The appeals court ruling was rendered by the 3rd Chamber, which oversees the terrorism convictions and is staffed by judges loyal to the Islamist government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The chamber is led by Judge Muhsin Şentürk, who is known to be close to the government and supportive of convictions when it comes to reviewing cases of critics, opponents and dissidents who were convicted on false charges of terrorism in Turkey.

This ISIS case represents yet another example of how the bulk of successful ISIS convictions, already rare in the lower courts, have been thrown out by senior judges who appear to follow the lenient guidelines of the Erdoğan government when it comes to cracking down on jihadist groups.

The political pressure on judges and prosecutors who were asked to go easy on jihadists began in 2014, when the Erdoğan government started removing judges, prosecutors and police chiefs who were investigating radical groups in Turkey. The dismissed officials were accused of links to the Gülen movement, led by Turkish Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen, who has been an outspoken critic of the Erdoğan regime due to pervasive corruption and Turkey's aiding and abetting of jihadist groups in Syria and Libya.

More than 130,000 civil servants have been dismissed by the government with no effective judicial or administrative investigation, 4,560 of whom were judges and prosecutors and were replaced by pro-Erdoğan, Islamist and neo-nationalist staff. As a result of the massive purge, the Turkish judiciary and law enforcement authorities have become tools in the hands of the Islamist government of President Erdoğan and his allies.

Thousands of militants, both Turkish and foreign, have used Turkish territory to cross into Syria with the help of smugglers in order to fight alongside ISIS groups there. Turkish intelligence agency MIT (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı) has facilitated their travel, with Kilis, a border province in Turkey's Southeast, one of the main crossing points into ISIS-held territory. Human smugglers were known to have been active in the border area, although Turkish authorities often overlooked their trips in and out of Syria.

There have been some cases, however, in which ISIS suspects were detained and indicted on terrorism charges. But very few resulted in convictions in the lower courts. The decision of Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals to overturn rare cases of conviction of suspects on ISIS terror charges sets an important precedent in Turkey's criminal justice system. The ruling will effectively render to zero the chances of convicting an ISIS member on terrorism charges in the lower courts.

Turkish officials do not disclose the number of successful convictions in ISIS cases and decline to respond to parliamentary questions asking for such information. Instead, they often float figures on the number of detentions and arrests, which in many cases result in release and acquittal.

	<p>Erdoğan announced on October 10, 2019 that there were around 5,500 ISIS terrorists in Turkish prisons, of which half were foreign nationals. Yet, on October 25, 2019 Justice Minister Abdülhamit Gül stated at a press conference that there were 1,163 ISIS arrestees and convicts in prison.</p> <p>Responding to a parliamentary question on July 21, 2020, Gül said 1,195 ISIS members were in prisons either as convicts or suspects in pretrial detention. Of these, 791 were foreign nationals, he added. He declined to say how many had actually been convicted.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 ISIS violently expanding across Africa
SOURCE	https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/how-isis-violently-expanding-across-africa-199940
GIST	<p>At least 100 people have been killed in the ongoing prison battle between the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Islamic State (ISIS) fighters in northeastern Syria. In a well-coordinated attack, ISIS fighters bombarded Gweiran prison in Al-Hasakah on Thursday, attempting to free the thousands of ISIS detainees held there. This complex attack involving suicide bombers, prison rioters, and sleeper cells is ISIS’ most significant escalation since its “caliphate” was defeated in 2019.</p> <p>Within twenty-four hours of the onset of the prison attack in Syria, ISIS militants killed eleven Iraqi soldiers in an army base in Diyala across the border. Although the severity and timing of these two cross-border attacks is alarming, an uptick in ISIS-directed offensives throughout Africa in recent months indicates the resurgence of terrorism is not limited to territories previously ruled by the organization. ISIS’s apparent shift towards Africa should be met with adjusted counterterrorism measures that focus on the group’s expansionist campaign.</p> <p>While ISIS’ rampage in the Middle East draws attention, reports of parallel offensives in Africa largely go under the radar. In the latest U.S. State Department report on terrorism, released this month, ISIS activity was deemed a “persistent and pervasive threat worldwide.” The report elaborated that ISIS affiliates present outside of Iraq and Syria contributed to more fatalities in 2020 than in any other year. The terror group’s newest affiliate, the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP), conducted attacks across Africa, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania, and Mozambique. In 2021, ISCAP claimed responsibility for 166 attacks that killed over 600 people. ISIS-directed attacks in Africa continue to rise, indicating the group’s prioritization of gaining a foothold outside of Iraq and Syria.</p> <p>Additionally, ISIS has begun to launch attacks in Uganda, a major player in the anti-Islamist campaign within Africa. Uganda single handedly supplies the most troops to the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia, which exists to counter ISIS-affiliate Al-Shabab. In recent months, the surge of ISIS attacks in Uganda suggest the terror group is attempting to stamp out its toughest resistance on the continent. In October 2021, ISIS carried out its first attacks in Uganda, bombing a pub frequented by government officials and a public bus. One month later, ISIS claimed responsibility for two nearly simultaneous suicide bombings in Uganda’s capital, killing three and injuring dozens. All three attacks were perpetrated by ISCAP, which is recognized locally as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).</p> <p>The ADF was created in the mid-1990s as a militant Islamist movement that relied on guerilla warfare in the eastern DRC for more than twenty years. The group was largely idle until 2017, when ISIS financiers began to fund the group’s terror activity. By 2019, ISIS declared ADF as its official affiliate, providing the group with technical training and more funding. ISIS’ modus operandi—securing and metamorphosing pre-existing militant groups to serve as conduits for terror—has proven to be a successful strategy in Africa.</p> <p>In 2022, ISIS will likely launch even more attacks throughout Africa, attracting new recruits and propaganda opportunities along the way. Today, ISIS controls less than 1 percent of African territory. However, without a more effective counterterrorism strategy that recognizes the organization’s new African frontier, ISIS is bound to gain a stronger foothold on the continent.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 US-backed forces close in on ISIS holdouts
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/26/sdf-kurdish-islamic-state-prison/
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD — The U.S.-backed Syrian Defense Forces said Wednesday that it had freed 23 of its members from Islamic State militants inside a besieged prison in the Syrian town of Hasakah, as a days-long standoff that included U.S. ground troops appeared to be drawing to a close.</p> <p>The siege of Ghwaryan prison in the northeast city of Hasakah began late Thursday, as Islamist militant fighters set off a car bomb that prompted some prisoners to riot and overpower their guards, believing that the attackers had come to free them, officials from the SDF have said.</p> <p>Almost three years after the SDF, which is largely Kurdish-led, captured the final sliver of land the extremist Islamic State group had described as its Islamic caliphate, roughly 10,000 alleged members are packed into prison cells across northeast Syria, in legal limbo and awaiting trial or repatriation to home countries around the world.</p> <p>Roughly 3,000 of those were in the facility in Hasakah, officials said. A full head count was not available Wednesday, but it appeared that dozens of inmates might have escaped, and also that scores had been killed.</p> <p>Officials say that dozens are still holed up in a wing of the prison that had been reserved for children and teenagers. The fighting is taking place in a near-media blackout, aside from official statements from the SDF, but video footage and phone calls from inside the cells indicate that the damage and bloodshed could be extensive.</p> <p>Negotiations have been underway for several days to end the standoff. “Since yesterday morning, the number of prison staff liberated has risen to 23,” the SDF said in a statement early Wednesday.</p> <p>The siege of Ghwaryan Prison has unfolded like a chronicle foretold. Senior Kurdish and U.S.-led coalition officials have been warning for years that it was poorly defended, and vulnerable to attack. Islamic State leaders have repeatedly urged their followers to break their fellow militants free.</p> <p>“This isn’t a surprise,” said one senior Western official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press. “Everyone knew this might happen.”</p> <p>But the size of the attack from outside the prison walls caught the SDF by surprise, and suggested that the militants, thought to be largely defeated, might have rebuilt their fighting capabilities more than previously thought. For days, they have used snipers, grenades and suicide belts to hold their ground as civilians streamed out of the surrounding neighborhoods amid the din of battle.</p> <p>In public statements, the SDF said that the attack had been planned for up to six months. It was unclear how this was known, or why it had not been thwarted.</p> <p>Huddling in a nearby mosque this week, civilians described a panicked escape as fighting engulfed the area. “We didn’t bring anything with us, we just wanted to get the kids out,” said 36-year-old Nashmiya al-Badir. “It’s been years since such an attack. We thought that ISIS must be far from where we live.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Afghanistan worsening humanitarian crisis
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/24/afghanistan-humanitarian-crisis-hunger/
GIST	<p>Widespread hunger, a crippled economy and a population in desperate need of assistance. Afghanistan is in the midst of a worsening humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>Most international assistance was cut off after the Taliban took over in August. Hospitals and schools cannot afford to pay their staff, and many people cannot afford to buy food, adding to an already dire hunger crisis.</p>

“It’s the sheer levels of desperation that we’re seeing in people,” said Vicki Aken, Afghanistan director of the International Rescue Committee. “The humanitarian situation seems to be going from bad to worse.”

Widespread hunger

Over 22 million people, more than half the country’s population, are facing crisis-levels of hunger, the majority of them unable to guarantee when their next meal is going to be, according to the U.N. World Food Program. This marks a dramatic increase since September, when more than 14 million people were at risk of going hungry. The organization also estimated that in December, 95 percent of the population had insufficient food consumption, adopting measures to cope with their situation by skipping a meal, for example. Since October 2020, when drought struck Afghanistan, the situation has continued to get worse.

U.N. officials said the situation is intensifying at an unprecedented rate.

“I’ve never experienced how quickly it’s deteriorated,” said Mary-Ellen McGroarty, the Afghanistan director of WFP. “The malnutrition rates are doubling week on week. Emaciated children are coming into the hospitals.”

The country was already facing its worst drought in 30 years, leaving many in the countryside desperate. Now with the failing economy, farmers are unable to find work elsewhere.

“The economic implosion of food and fuel prices, the impact of the drought and the devastating legacy of the conflict all collide, creating a tsunami of hunger and malnutrition across the country,” McGroarty said.

A failed economy

Since the fall of Kabul in August and the withdrawal of U.S. troops, the Taliban-controlled government has been choked off from the international economy, resulting in a currency crisis, extensive poverty and the collapse of key public services such as health care.

“Yes, it was terrible prior to August,” Aken said. “But when the development funding was cut off on Aug. 15 and the sanctions were imposed and the assets frozen, that really took the situation from very bad to an extreme.”

The United Nations estimated that 97 percent of the population could plunge into poverty by the middle of this year. In September the poverty rate was at 72 percent. The economic collapse has touched nearly every part of life in the country, from the ability to purchase food to the hopes of finding employment, or keeping warm, or accessing health care.

“It is becoming a vicious circle we are witnessing right now in Afghanistan,” said Ingy Sedky, a communication manager at the International Committee of the Red Cross in Afghanistan. “The lack of cash and nonpayment of salaries lead to inability to get proper food and nutrition. And now with the harsh winter conditions, it exposes many to additional health risks.”

She described nurses in maternity hospitals only having the money for one small portable heater in a big ward. They would “squeeze three babies in one incubator as they don’t have the heating system, or enough equipment to care for them,” Sedky said.

A plea for aid

The dire crisis has pushed aid organizations and the United Nations to ramp up renewed calls for funding. In mid-January, the U.N. and its partners appealed for more than \$5 billion for the year, more than the organization has ever requested for a single nation. Most of the aid, \$4.4 billion, would be directed to helping Afghans inside the country. The rest would go toward the millions of Afghan refugees in neighboring countries like Iran and Pakistan.

	<p>U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths said without those funds, “there won’t be a future” for the people of Afghanistan. But in the past the organization has not been able to meet its funding needs.</p> <p>The United States, which froze much of its Afghanistan funding when the Taliban came into power, has since recommitted to some of its aid, announcing \$308 million in additional assistance this month, which will provide shelter, health care, food, water and other basic services.</p> <p>In the meantime, the U.N., aid groups and donor countries have been working to find ways to bring money to Afghanistan without cash ending up in the hands of the Taliban. Last fall, the U.N. Development Program began to use commercial banks to send direct payments to health workers through cellphones. Those with no phones received cash in person.</p> <p>Aid workers said it is important that countries continue to support the ailing country.</p> <p>“States must invest in Afghanistan,” Sedky said. “This is the only way to prevent a total collapse of the banking system and essential services like health care and education.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 ISIS resurges; US drawn back into the fray
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/world/middleeast/isis-syria.html
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD, Iraq — An audacious attack on a prison housing thousands of former ISIS fighters in Syria. A series of strikes against military forces in neighboring Iraq. And a horrific video harking back to the grimmest days of the insurgency that showed the beheading of an Iraqi police officer.</p> <p>The evidence of a resurgence of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq is mounting by the day, nearly three years after the militants lost the last patch of territory of their so-called caliphate, which once stretched across vast parts of the two countries. The fact that ISIS was able to mount these coordinated and sophisticated attacks in recent days shows that what had been believed to be disparate sleeper cells are re-emerging as a more serious threat.</p> <p>“It’s a wake-up call for regional players, for national players, that ISIS is not over, that the fight is not over,” said Kawa Hassan, Middle East and North Africa director at the Stimson Center, a Washington research institute. “It shows the resilience of ISIS to strike back at the time and place of their choosing.”</p> <p>On Tuesday, fighting between a Kurdish-led militia backed by the United States and the militants spread from the embattled Sinaa prison in northeastern Syria to surrounding neighborhoods, swelling into the biggest confrontation between the American military and its Syrian allies and ISIS in three years.</p> <p>The U.S. military joined the fight after the militants attacked the makeshift prison in the city of Hasaka, trying to free their fellow fighters. The Islamic State now controls about a quarter of the prison and is holding hundreds of hostages, many of them children detained when the caliphate that their families had joined fell in 2019.</p> <p>The United States has conducted airstrikes and provided intelligence and ground troops in Bradley fighting vehicles to help cordon off the prison.</p> <p>Even as skirmishing was taking place around the prison Tuesday, fighting involving ISIS fighters also broke out about 150 miles away, in Rasafa, about 30 miles outside the city of Raqqa.</p> <p>The militants’ show of force was not limited to Syria.</p> <p>In Iraq, around the same time as the prison attack began, ISIS fighters stormed an army outpost in Diyala Province, killing 10 soldiers and an officer in the deadliest attack in several years on an Iraqi military base. Gunmen approached the base from three sides late at night while some of the soldiers slept.</p>

The attack raised fears that some of the same conditions in Iraq that allowed for ISIS's rise in 2014 were now making room for it to reconstitute.

In December, insurgents kidnapped four Iraqi hunters in a mountainous area of northeast Iraq, including a police colonel. The militants beheaded the police officer, and then released the gruesome video.

The attacks in Iraq, conducted by ISIS sleeper cells in remote mountain and desert areas, have highlighted a lack of coordination between Iraqi government forces and the Peshmerga, Kurdish forces of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Many of the attacks take place in disputed territory claimed by both the Iraqi Kurdish government and the central government.

Ardian Shajkovci, director of the American Counterterrorism Targeting and Resilience Institute, said many of the militants arrested in attacks since the group lost the last of its territory three years ago appeared to be younger, and from families with older members tied to ISIS.

"If so," he said, "this is a new generation of ISIS recruits, changing the calculus and threat landscape in many ways."

Iraq has struggled to deal with tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens who are relatives of ISIS fighters and have been collectively punished and placed in detention camps — now feared to be breeding grounds for radicalization.

Corruption in Iraqi security forces has left some of their bases without proper supplies and allowed soldiers and officers to neglect their duties, contributing to the collapse of entire army divisions that retreated in 2014 rather than fight ISIS.

In Syria on Tuesday, the Syrian Democratic Forces said that they had conducted sweeps in Hasaka neighborhoods near the prison, killing five ISIS fighters who were wearing suicide belts.

The militia said that on Monday it had freed nine prison employees held by the Islamic State and killed another nine militants, including two suicide bombers, in raids around the prison. An S.D.F. spokesman, Farhad Shami, said that so far, 550 detainees who took part in the siege had surrendered.

The militia has also been negotiating with the ISIS leaders in the prison.

There are an estimated 3,500 detainees in the overcrowded prison. As many as 700 minors are also there, some 150 of them citizens of other countries who had been taken to Syria as young children when their parents left home to join the insurgency. An estimated 40,000 foreigners made their way to Syria to fight or work for the caliphate.

The prison siege has highlighted the plight of thousands of foreign children who have been detained for three years in camps and prisons in the region, abandoned by their own countries.

The prison inmates include boys as young as 12. Some were transferred to the prison after they were deemed too old to remain in detention camps that held families of suspected Islamic State fighters.

The Syria director for Save the Children, Sonia Khush, said those detaining the children were responsible for their safety. But she also pointed a finger at foreign governments that have refused to repatriate their imprisoned citizens.

"Responsibility for anything that happens to these children also lies at the door of foreign governments who have thought that they can simply abandon their child nationals in Syria," Ms. Khush said.

At its height, in 2014, ISIS controlled about a third of Iraq and large parts of Syria, territory that rivaled Britain in size. When the last piece of it, in Baghuz, Syria, fell three years ago, women and young children were put in detention camps, while those believed to be fighters were sent to prison.

The main detention camp for the families, Al Hol, is squalid, overcrowded and dangerous, lacking sufficient food, medical services and guards. Amid the chaos, an increasingly radicalized segment of detainees has emerged to terrorize other camp residents.

When the boys at the camps become teenagers, they are usually transferred to Sinaa prison, where they are packed into overcrowded cells. Food, medical care and even sunlight are in scarce supply.

But their plight gets harder still when they turn 18. Even though none of the young foreigners have been charged with a crime, they are placed with the general prison population, where wounded ISIS fighters sleep three to a bed.

Outside the prison, the U.S. troops that have once again engaged in battle with ISIS fighters are part of a residual force of the American-led military coalition that was largely pulled out of the country in 2019. There are currently about 700 American troops in the region, operating mostly from a base in Hasaka, and another 200 near Syria's border with Jordan.

The Pentagon said that the armored Bradley fighting vehicles put in place to back the Kurdish-led S.D.F. forces were being used as barricades while the Kurdish militia tightened its cordon around the prison. A coalition official said the vehicles had been fired at and had returned fire.

"We have provided limited ground support, strategically positioned to assist security in the area," John F. Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, told reporters in Washington.

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HEADLINE	01/25 DHS warns DVEs could attack power grid
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/dhs-warns-that-right-wing-extremists-could-attack-power-grid?ref=home
GIST	<p>Domestic violent extremists and racially motivated extremists have been developing plans to attack the U.S. electric sector, according to an intelligence bulletin from the Department of Homeland Security that was issued this week and obtained by The Daily Beast.</p> <p>"DVEs have developed credible, specific plans to attack electricity infrastructure since at least 2020, identifying the electric grid as a particularly attractive target given its interdependency with other infrastructure sectors," the alert said.</p> <p>DHS' Office of Intelligence and Analysis issued the alert to the electric sector Monday, following requests from power companies to take stock of increased threats from domestic violent extremists in 2020 and 2021.</p> <p>The alert comes as DHS and federal investigators strain to keep up with the threat of domestic violent extremists, and continue to work to charge participants in the Jan. 6 insurrection. The head of DHS' Office of Intelligence and Analysis John Cohen told lawmakers in recent testimony that, nearly one year after the riot on Capitol Hill, the threat landscape from domestic violent extremists "is one of the most complex, volatile, and dynamic that I've experienced in my career."</p> <p>DHS has been buckling down on efforts to share more intelligence on domestic violent extremism with the private sector and state and local partners, according to Cohen. Over the last year and a half, the FBI has been pushing more resources to domestic terrorism investigations. And the FBI has more than doubled its domestic terrorism caseload since spring of 2020, according to FBI Director Christopher Wray.</p> <p>White supremacists expressed interest in "wreaking havoc" on the power grid if President Donald Trump were to lose re-election in 2020. And last year, four men with ties to racially motivated extremists were</p>

	<p>charged with conspiracy to damage the property of an energy facility in the United States, after using assault-style rifles in an attempt to explode a power substation.</p> <p>DHS intelligence suggests that domestic violent extremists will continue to plot attacks against electrical infrastructure in the U.S. that “may result in physical damage.” Conversations from domestic violent extremists online in recent months have focused on encouraging lone wolf attacks, as well as attempts to inspire individuals with little or no training to go after electric infrastructure—including with firearms, improvised incendiary devices, hammers, and power saws.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 UK: 2 more arrests Texas synagogue attack
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/us/uk-police-arrest-two-more-men-over-texas-synagogue-attack-2022-01-26/
GIST	<p>LONDON, Jan 26 (Reuters) - British police said on Wednesday they had arrested two men in the northern English city of Manchester as part of a U.S. investigation into a hostage taking at a synagogue in Texas earlier in January.</p> <p>British police had previously said they had arrested four people over the incident: two teenagers in Manchester plus one man in Birmingham and another man in Manchester. The teenagers have been released without charge.</p> <p>The day-long siege occurred on Jan. 15 when a British man took four people hostage at a synagogue in Colleyville, about 16 miles northeast of Fort Worth, Texas. The gunman died as federal agents stormed the temple while the four hostages were released unharmed.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 UK bomber asylum claims rejected twice
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/24/liverpool-bomber-emad-al-swealmeen-asylum-claim-rejected-before-attack
GIST	<p>The Liverpool bomber had an asylum claim rejected on multiple grounds six years before he attempted to detonate a homemade explosive outside a hospital, court documents show.</p> <p>Emad al-Swealmeen, 32, was killed when the bomb he was carrying exploded inside a taxi outside Liverpool women’s hospital on Remembrance Sunday last year.</p> <p>The Home Office twice rejected Swealmeen’s claims for asylum – once in 2014 and again in 2020 – and new details raise questions about why he was not pursued for deportation as long ago as 2015.</p> <p>Court documents obtained by BBC News show he claimed to be of Syrian heritage and in fear for his life, but was unable to give basic details about where his family lived or why they were in danger.</p> <p>Language analysis conducted by the Home Office concluded that there was a high likelihood that he was Iraqi and was “very unlikely” to be Syrian.</p> <p>Swealmeen travelled to the UK in 2014 on a genuine Jordanian passport, which gave his birthplace as Iraq and his date of birth as 11 October 1989.</p> <p>An immigration judge dismissed his asylum appeal in April 2015, writing in a ruling quoted by BBC News: “His account of his time in Syria gives the impression of someone quoting information that is in the public domain rather than having first-hand experience.</p> <p>“The appellant did not identify himself with any particular faction or indicate that he would be at risk other than in a general sense.”</p> <p>That ruling meant the Home Office had the green light to send Swealmeen back to Iraq or Jordan, as it had previously told him it would do.</p>

	<p>Instead, however, Swealmeen remained in the UK and is thought to have been moved to the Fazakerley area of Liverpool in late 2016.</p> <p>In 2017 he mounted a new asylum claim using a different name but that was rejected at the end of 2020, prompting another appeal in January 2021.</p> <p>Police believe that Swealmeen was plotting a terror attack by at least April 2021, when he rented a property and started buying parts needed for a bomb.</p> <p>Detectives believe it is most likely that he acted alone although counter-terrorism experts have said it is incredibly rare for someone to plan an atrocity for seven months without telling anyone.</p> <p>The case raises questions about why Swealmeen was not deported in 2015 when his first asylum appeal was rejected on several grounds, and he could have been spotted earlier as a danger to himself and others.</p> <p>The Home Office declined to comment on Swealmeen's case but said: "We are fixing the broken asylum system. The 'new plan for immigration' will require people to raise all protection-related issues upfront to tackle the practice of making multiple and sequential claims and enable the removal of those with no right to be in our country more quickly."</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/25 Hospitals: unprecedented blood shortage
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/im-very-concerned-washington-hospitals-worried-about-unprecedented-blood-shortage
GIST	<p>Grappling with a number of challenges due to the surge of omicron cases, hospitals can add yet another hurdle to their work: an "unprecedented" shortage of blood supplies.</p> <p>A problem being felt across the nation, locally it's being tied to that highly-transmissible variant, a change in how blood donations are gathered, donors not showing up to their appointments and a blast of severe weather to round out 2021. It has Dr. John Hess, the medical director at Harborview Medical Center's transfusion services, sounding the alarm.</p> <p>"We are looking at the most severe blood shortage that has occurred in the last 10 years," he told KOMO News Tuesday.</p> <p>Prior to the pandemic, he said roughly 70 percent of blood donations came from mobile-type drives. With those having gone to the wayside, donors have to make appointments at physical sites.</p> <p>Typically, Hess said hospitals prefer to have at least three days-worth of blood on-site. As of now, he said they have about a days-worth. With hospital staffing taking a hit due to COVID and supplies as low as they are, it means a pause in elective surgeries.</p> <p>"We have stopped, essentially, all of our elective surgeries just to free up nurses to take care of people which means we're using less blood," Hess said.</p> <p>Other hospitals have not done quite as well.</p> <p>"On the eastern side (of Washington), some of the hospitals have had their inventories get sufficiently low that they have not been able to take care of some of their patients and have had to send them to other hospitals," Hess said.</p>

	<p>Earlier this month, the team at Bloodworks Northwest put out a “code red” announcement because of the low supply. Executive Vice President of Blood Services Vicki Finson the decline in donors started in the fall.</p> <p>“We did see a lot of donors come in and donate blood and we’re in a better place than we were then,” she said.</p> <p>Currently, supply is sitting around a days-worth, up from just half that.</p> <p>Bloodworks, too, is also dealing with a staffing shortage. Having made some new hires, Finson said it’s too soon to say things are looking better overall in terms of blood donations.</p> <p>“I’m concerned,” Finson said. “I’m very concerned.”</p> <p>With this topic back in the spotlight, it’s led to a renewed push to expand donor eligibility to raise donor bans on certain groups based on their sexual orientation.</p> <p>“We are hopeful that the FDA will listen to all the blood centers and the rest of the world who is saying we should re-look at this,” Finson said.</p> <p>With uncertainty looming as to how long all of this will last, Finson and Hess are encouraging anyone who can donate to do so.</p> <p>“Many people simply don’t think about it as something society needs to have happen,” Hess said. “If we’re going to have it, people need to donate it. If you’re able to do this, it’s deeply appreciated.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Exhaustion after walk signals early death?
SOURCE	https://www.studyfinds.org/older-adults-fatigue-early-death/
GIST	<p>PITTSBURGH, Pa. — Older adults who feel particularly tired after activities such as light housework or a 30-minute walk may be at an increased risk of dying over the next three years, according to new research. Scientists from the University of Pittsburgh found that older individuals who displayed high levels of exhaustion after these activities were more than twice as likely to die within the next 2.7 years compared to their peers experiencing less exhaustion.</p> <p>Study authors say this is the first ever piece of research to establish a connection between fatigue and mortality. The team measured fatigue after activities — or “fatigability” — using the <i>novel Pittsburgh Fatigability Scale</i>.</p> <p>“This is the time of year when people make—and break—New Year’s resolutions to get more physical activity,” says lead study author Nancy W. Glynn, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology at Pitt’s Graduate School of Public Health, in a university release. “I hope our findings provide some encouragement to stick with exercise goals. Previous research indicates that getting more physical activity can reduce a person’s fatigability. Our study is the first to link more severe physical fatigability to an earlier death. Conversely, lower scores indicate greater energy and more longevity.”</p> <p>Moving more could mean living longer</p> <p>More than 2,900 older adults over the age of 60 participated in the study, rating on a scale of one to five how tired they typically felt following various activities. Some of the activities examined in the survey include a leisurely 30-minute walk, light housework, and heavy gardening.</p> <p>After tracking health and mortality outcomes among participants for roughly three years, and accounting for various additional factors that may increase mortality risk (mental health, age, gender), study authors came to a remarkable conclusion. Specifically, adults who scored 25 points or higher on the <i>Pittsburgh</i></p>

	<p><i>Fatigability Scale</i> were 2.3 times more likely to pass away over the next 2.7 years in comparison to others who scored below 25 points.</p> <p>“There has been research showing that people who increase their physical activity can decrease their fatigability score,” Dr. Glynn explains. “And one of the best ways to increase physical activity—which simply means moving more—is by setting manageable goals and starting a routine, like a regular walk or scheduled exercise.”</p> <p>“While the <i>Pittsburgh Fatigability Scale</i> has been widely adopted in research as a reliable, sensitive way to measure fatigability, it is underutilized in hospital settings and clinical trials,” the researcher concludes.</p> <p>“My ultimate goal is to develop a physical activity intervention targeting a reduction in fatigability as a means to stem the downward spiral of impaired physical function common with the aging process. By reducing fatigability, one can change how they feel, potentially motivating them to do more.”</p> <p>The study is published in the <i>Journal of Gerontology</i>.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 First Nation: possible B.C. unmarked graves
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/3abpdk/93-unmarked-graves-found-at-residential-school-that-targeted-indigenous-children
GIST	<p>A First Nation in British Columbia, Canada, has detected 93 “reflections,” or possible unmarked graves, at a former residential school—the latest in a nationwide search.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Williams Lake First Nation of the Secwepemc Nation, located in interior B.C., about 300 km north of Kamloops, announced preliminary findings from its eight-month investigation at the St. Joseph’s Mission Residential School grounds and surrounding areas.</p> <p>Research has uncovered stories of murder, systemic torture, starvation, rape, and sexual assault at St. Joseph’s Mission Residential School, as well as the death of an 8-year-old boy, Duncan Sticks, who had tried to run away, said Williams Lake First Nation Chief Willie Sellars.</p> <p>Children suffered rotten food, fire hazards, overcrowding, pests, and illness, and there were reports of students trying to die by suicide, Sellars said, with non-Indigenous authorities opting not to investigate as the “child was only an Indian.”</p> <p>Clergy that served were tried and convicted of sexual crimes against children in the 1990s. At the time, new victims came forward to RCMP, but police refused to look into the new complaints, Sellars said.</p> <p>“Child pregnancies were widespread and covered up,” Sellars said. “In survivors’ accounts that are disturbing beyond words, we’ve heard accounts that unwanted babies of priests were burned in the incinerator.”</p> <p>Sellars said that the 93 detected reflections won’t include the remains lost because of incineration or drowning.</p> <p>St. Joseph’s Mission operated as a residential school from 1891 until it closed in 1981, with children from all over, including Williams Lake First Nation, forced to attend. It was run in part by the same Catholic order that ran the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, where about 200 unmarked graves were detected in May 2021.</p> <p>First Nations pupils performed labour-intensive tasks, including serving white students, Sellars said, adding there were several reports of children dying or disappearing from the facility.</p>

“The real story of what occurred has been intentionally obscured. There is clear evidence that religious entities, federal government, and the RCMP have knowingly participated in destruction of records and cover-up,” Sellars said.

“There can be no reconciliation before there is truth,” Sellars said. But “while there is hope that we can heal as a nation, the trauma of individuals and communities is still very much present.” Sellars also called any misinformation about or attempts to pacify the horrific things that went on at residential schools “distorted.”

Efforts to reconcile must be through leadership of First Nations people and communities, Sellars said. Today, the provincial and federal governments have committed to support Williams Lake First Nation’s ongoing investigation.

The First Nation has so far used ground-penetrating radar and consultation with survivors as part of its scan to detect the 93 unmarked graves. It’s also pursuing archival research and relying on other technologies.

Last May, Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc confirmed hundreds of unmarked graves at the Catholic-run Kamloops Indian Residential School grounds. So far, more than 4,000 unmarked graves have been confirmed and experts expect the figure to climb to at least 10,000.

The government and churches ran residential “schools” across Canada to forcibly assimilate 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children. Children were physically and sexually abused, and brutally punished for expressing their Indigenous identities, including speaking in their mother tongues. Its legacy continues to harm Indigenous children in the foster care system who are sometimes forcibly removed from their communities.

Last week, the federal government agreed to [give 875,000 residential school-related records](#) to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and promised to look for more. It’s a move that could help Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc identify the people buried in Kamloops, [CBC reported](#).

"Access to the records means not having to re-traumatize... residential school survivors to pinpoint information about who attended KIRS and who could possibly be in the unmarked graves," Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc Kukpi7 (Chief) Rosanne Casimir told CBC News.

Several records related to St. Joseph’s are still missing, including some student registries.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has demanded an in-person apology from Pope Francis for the Catholic Church’s outsized role in the residential school system—an act of accountability that is [yet to happen](#). Indigenous delegates were supposed to meet the pope in December, but the meet-up was delayed because of Omicron.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Shark attacks rise after years of decline
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jan/25/shark-attacks-increased-2021-years-decline
GIST	<p>Shark attacks increased around the world in 2021 following three years of decline, though beach closures in 2020 caused by the coronavirus pandemic could make the numbers seem more dramatic, officials in the US said on Monday.</p> <p>Researchers with the International Shark Attack File recorded 73 unprovoked incidents last year compared to 52 in 2020, according to a new report administered by the Florida Museum of Natural History and the American Elasmobranch Society.</p>

	<p>The International Shark Attack File manager, Tyler Bowling, pointed out that 52 bites in 2020 were the lowest documented in more than a decade. The 73 bites in 2021 more closely align with the five-year global average of 72.</p> <p>“Shark bites dropped drastically in 2020 due to the pandemic,” Bowling said. “This past year was much more typical, with average bite numbers from an assortment of species and fatalities from white sharks, bull sharks and tiger sharks.”</p> <p>Researchers saw 11 shark-related fatalities last year, with nine considered unprovoked. Australia had three unprovoked deaths, followed by New Caledonia with two. The US, Brazil, New Zealand and South Africa each had a single unprovoked fatal shark attack.</p> <p>Provoked attacks are defined as when humans initiate contact, such as divers trying to touch a shark or fishermen removing a shark from a fishing net, according to the International Shark Attack File.</p> <p>Florida has led the US and the rest of the world in unprovoked shark bites for decades, and the trend continued in 2021, researchers said.</p> <p>Florida had 28 unprovoked bites last year, compared to 19 in the rest of the US and 26 total outside the US. This is consistent with Florida’s most recent five-year annual average of 25 attacks. Of Florida’s 28 unprovoked bites, 17 were in Volusia county, which includes Daytona Beach.</p> <p>The single fatal unprovoked shark attack in the US in 2021 was in California. A man was killed while boogie boarding in Morro Bay on Christmas Eve.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/24 Chinese American: in end treated like a spy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/24/science/gang-chen-mit-china.html
GIST	<p>CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — When Gang Chen returned to his laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on Friday, the day after the government had dismissed charges of lying on grant applications, he was surrounded by well-wishers, offering hugs and congratulations.</p> <p>There were invitations, too. Colleagues were asking him to join funded research studies, resuming the work that has occupied his adult life.</p> <p>Dr. Chen studies heat transfer; he hopes to develop a semiconductor that could convert heat from car exhaust into electricity, or fabric for clothing that could cool the body. During the year since his arrest, that had been the hardest thing, tearing himself away from research.</p> <p>Dr. Chen said thank you, but no. After the experience of the last year — the early-morning arrest, the handcuffs and shackles, being described, in a news conference, as loyal to China — he is uncertain if he will ever feel safe applying for U.S. government funds for research again.</p> <p>“You work hard, you have good output, you build a reputation,” Dr. Chen said, in a three-and-a-half-hour interview at his M.I.T. office, the first he has given about the case. “The government gets what they want, right? But in the end, you’re treated like a spy. That just breaks your heart. It breaks your confidence.”</p> <p>Last week, the government dismissed the case against Dr. Chen, which alleged that he had concealed seven Chinese affiliations in applications for \$2.7 million in grants from the U.S. Energy Department. Prosecutors announced that they had received new information indicating that Dr. Chen had not been obliged to disclose those affiliations, undercutting the basis of the case.</p> <p>“We understand that our charging decisions deeply impact people’s lives,” said Rachael Rollins, who was sworn in this month as the new United States Attorney. “As United States Attorney, I will always</p>

encourage the prosecutors in our office to engage in this type of rigorous and continued review at every stage of a proceeding. Today's dismissal is a result of that process."

The dismissal is a setback to the China Initiative, an effort started in 2018 to crack down on economic and scientific espionage by China. Many of the prosecutions, like the case against Dr. Chen, do not allege espionage or theft of information, but something narrower: failing to disclose Chinese affiliations in grant applications to U.S. agencies. Critics say it has instilled a pervasive atmosphere of fear among scientists of Chinese descent.

Dr. Chen described the experience of the last year as traumatic and deeply disillusioning.

In recent months, prosecutors floated an agreement in which the government would have dropped the criminal charges in exchange for acknowledgment of some links to China, he said. He refused it, he said.

"That's just my mentality," he said. "I didn't do anything wrong."

The son of two mathematics teachers who were sent to teach on farms during China's Cultural Revolution, Dr. Chen grew up without any hope of becoming a scientist. His parents, the descendants of landowners, had a "bad classification" from the Chinese government, and were viewed suspiciously. His father warned him he would probably spend his life as a farmer.

But then Mao Zedong died. Dr. Chen was one of the first classes of Chinese students to take standardized tests, and his scores vaulted him into an academic elite. He immigrated to the United States at 25, and became a naturalized citizen in 2000.

During his years at M.I.T., he added, he had often dissuaded scientists who were being recruited to take their research out of the United States. The prosecutions of scientists in the United States have shaken him so deeply, he said, that he isn't sure he would do that again.

"I don't know whether I could give the same advice," he said. "I don't know how this is going to develop. I think the country must wake up. We are killing ourselves. We are committing a real suicidal act, right? I really don't know how to advise people now on this. Maybe give it some time. I don't know. It's hard to say."

An early-morning arrest

By 2019, the Justice Department had begun to announce charges against scientists collaborating with Chinese institutions. Dr. Chen followed the cases casually, through friends and colleagues. He decided against taking a sabbatical year in China, for fear it would make him a target.

In January 2020, he was alarmed by [the arrest of Charles M. Lieber](#), the head of Harvard's chemistry department, who was charged with hiding his participation in China's Thousand Talents recruitment program. But neither Dr. Chen nor his colleagues saw parallels with their own activities, he said.

"Most of us, when we looked at the government accusation, we said, 'Wow, he did that?'" he said. "You see, you tend to believe in government."

But he, too, was under investigation. That same month, Dr. Chen was detained for two or three hours at Logan International Airport as he returned from a trip to China, Egypt and Morocco. He answered questions from a Homeland Security agent, balking only at the end of the interview, when the agent asked for the passwords to his devices.

M.I.T. provided him an outside counsel, Robert Fisher, a former prosecutor who met with him eight times over the course of the next year. Still, Dr. Chen said, he had little concern that the investigation would result in anything.

“My thinking is, I didn’t do anything wrong,” he said. “So whatever they look at, they won’t find that I did anything wrong.”

At 6:30 a.m. on Jan. 14, 2021, he was making coffee when someone came to the door. He opened it to see between 10 and 20 federal agents. He was told to stand in a corner while agents went to wake his wife and daughter. When his wife saw that he was being handcuffed and led away, she began to speak to the F.B.I. agents, and he considered calling out to her, to tell her to stop, but was afraid to speak.

“I didn’t dare use Chinese — because I spoke with her in Mandarin, right, most of the time — but I didn’t dare to use Chinese,” he said. “I regret so much, once they took me away, because I should have shouted in Chinese to her, ‘Anything you say can be used against you.’”

Dr. Chen spent the next few hours in custody, pacing in his cell and then doing yoga. He remembers asking the F.B.I. agents whether they had been asked to make sure he did not commit suicide, and reassuring them that he did not intend to. When he was finally released, at around 2 p.m., and was in a car on the way home, he began shaking.

Dr. Chen, who has experimented with standup comedy, joked — half-joked — that the experience had so disgusted them that both he and his wife lost weight.

“We were both of us so disgusted,” he said. “We didn’t know what this word really meant. It’s real. Disgust is biological. We used to see this word, but it’s a biological reaction after everything that has happened.”

Dr. Chen was put on paid leave, so he was not allowed on campus or to have contact with M.I.T. employees. He had five or six active research projects, and during the months that followed, they slowed and faltered. The 15 postdoctoral students he worked with were transferred to other research groups, taking their knowledge with them.

“We are all losers, right?” Dr. Chen said. “My reputation got ruined. My students, my post-docs, they changed their career. They changed to other groups. M.I.T., the country, the U.S., we lose. I can’t calculate the loss. That loss cannot be calculated.”

Last September, he got good news. Prosecutors had floated the idea of a deferred prosecution agreement, which would have allowed him to return to work and apply for government grants in the future. In return, said his lawyer, Mr. Fisher, he would have to admit to having some ties to China, none of them a violation of the law.

Such a deal, Mr. Fisher said, is “very, very rare,” and would have insulated Dr. Chen from the risk of going to trial, something he tried to impress on Dr. Chen.

“A lot of people would view that as a win,” he said. “I told him, ‘God, this is going to be crushing for me if we get a guilty at trial and I’m sitting with you in the courtroom.’”

Dr. Chen said he considered the deal seriously. But he feared that there would be lingering questions about his innocence, or that he would be asked to speak to prosecutors about his colleagues.

“I would never incriminate anybody,” he said. “And seeing how terribly they can stretch the facts, I have zero confidence in them. Absolute zero.”

When the government’s motion to dismiss charges was made public, last Thursday, Dr. Chen was inundated with congratulations from colleagues. But he was somber.

“It’s hard to tell them directly that there is nothing to congratulate,” he said. “It’s just a sad history, sad for the country.”

	<p>He is not certain how he will resume his scientific career. Without a research group or a funding stream, he has been working on individual research papers. On Thursday, the day the charges were dropped, he woke up at 4:30 a.m. to finish a paper on energy transfer in water.</p> <p>But he said speaking out about the China Initiative felt like an obligation. In an editorial in the Boston Globe, Dr. Chen has called for Congress and the Justice Department to review his case and hold people involved in the prosecution accountable.</p> <p>And for now, at least, he has no interest in research grants from the U.S. government.</p> <p>“I am angry, I am afraid,” he said. “My love is science. I did not want politics, right? I saw that, and I got away from it. I do my devotion to science. I help people, I support. But I learned that you can’t get away. Politics impacts everybody. So if there are things that are not right, we all need to speak out.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Threats close 3 Mason Co. schools
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/3-mason-county-schools-closed-threats/NGBZF5IGYZBRZBO4XD3YH4NV7M/
GIST	<p>BELFAIR, Wash. — Officials with the North Mason School District say a middle school and two high schools in Belfair are closed Tuesday after threats were received.</p> <p>The district said the Mason County Sherriff’s Office recommended that Hawkins Middle School, James A. Taylor High School and North Mason High School be closed to students while deputies investigate threats of violence.</p> <p>No before or after school activities will be held.</p> <p>The sheriff’s office said the threat is specific to the upper campus only and not the elementary schools. Belfair and Sand Hill elementary schools will be open as usual.</p> <p>District officials said they would share more information when it becomes available.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Asia first: Thailand decriminalizes pot
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/thailand-asia-move-decriminalize-marijuana-82472907
GIST	<p>BANGKOK -- Thailand on Tuesday became the first country in Asia to approve the de facto decriminalization of marijuana, though authorities have left a grey area around its recreational use.</p> <p>Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul announced that the Narcotics Control Board had approved the dropping cannabis from the ministry's list of controlled drugs.</p> <p>The delisting by the ministry's Food and Drug Administration will now need to be formally signed by the health minister and enters into effect 120 days after its publication in the government gazette. It follows the removal of cannabis — a plant species to which both marijuana and hemp belong — last month from the list of illegal drugs under Thailand’s Narcotics Law.</p> <p>Police and lawyers contacted by The Associated Press said it was unclear if possession of marijuana would no longer be an offense subject to arrest. A tangle of related laws means that production and possession of marijuana remains regulated for the time being, leaving the legal status of recreational marijuana use in a grey area.</p> <p>The Health Ministry measure retains on its list of controlled drugs parts from the cannabis plant that contain more than 0.2% by weight of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the psychoactive ingredient that gives users a high.</p>

	<p>Thailand in 2020 became the first Asian nation to decriminalize the production and use of marijuana for medicinal purposes.</p> <p>Under changes made in 2020, most parts of the cannabis plant were dropped from the “Category 5” list of controlled drugs, but seeds and buds, which are associated with recreational use, were retained. The proposal now being implemented by the FDA removes all parts of the plant from the list.</p> <p>Health Minister Anutin has been the driving force behind decriminalizing marijuana. He is the leader of the Bhumjai Thai Party, a major partner in the country’s coalition government, and campaigned in the 2019 general election for legalization of marijuana production to aid farmers. The latest measure is also seen as helping to promote cannabis products as a major industry in Thailand.</p> <p>Anutin said last week that the FDA's delisting “responds to the government’s urgent policy in developing marijuana and hemp for medical and health care benefits, developing technology and creating income for the public.”</p> <p>His party announced that on Wednesday it will propose in Parliament a draft Cannabis Act to clarify the legal status of marijuana.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/25 Des Moines police focus Pacific Highway
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/des-moines-police-increase-patrols-on-pacific-highway-south-to-address-crime-uptick
GIST	<p>DES MOINES, Wash. - Des Moines Police Department launched a new initiative in January 2022, expanding its special investigations unit to address the issue of rising crime and violence in a Des Moines neighborhood.</p> <p>The patrol is focused on Pacific Highway South between South 224th Street and South 260th Street. Members of the special investigations unit, street crime detectives, a code enforcement officer, patrol division, community officers and crisis responders are leading the initiative.</p> <p>"Primarily focused on outreach and helping people. We're not necessarily out there first as enforcement, although that is a primary component of the police department, but our goal is to outreach first," said Detective Sgt. Scott Oak with Des Moines police.</p> <p>John Takyi has seen a lot of change along the highway. He has owned St. John Barbershop on that street for 10 years. He said he has lost customers because the increasing crime, violence, prostitution and homelessness has gotten out of hand.</p> <p>"People scared. And people will call, 'Hey, John—your area, there was a shooting. Man, I have to be very careful coming there.' And it's not a joke, they are serious. Who wants to go to a place where maybe they can get in crossfire?" said Takyi.</p> <p>Next to his business is the La Familia bar and restaurant where six people were shot in September after a fight broke out. Three people died.</p> <p>The restaurant is near the intersection of Pacific Highway South and Kent Des Moines Road—what police said was one of the most challenging parts of the city. It's also the intersection where two pedestrians were killed during a hit-and-run this month.</p>

"We've had numerous shootings in that area," said Oak. "That intersection splits the City of Kent and the City of Des Moines, so we share responsibility in that area."

So far, [the patrol has made five arrests](#), recovered 11 stolen cars and issued 23 warnings. Oak said a very important part in doing this work is their community officers and crisis responders from the GPS Unit (Getting People Services). He said the department hired the members to do outreach with those who are experiencing homelessness.

"That's why it's so important for us to have them out there—not in uniforms, they don't look like the police, they're not acting like the police. They're out there purely to try to get people to services and get people off the street and get people into shelters or homes, help people find jobs, food," said Oak.

So far, the [patrol has made 13 referrals to resources](#) for people experiencing homelessness or a mental health condition. The GPS Unit is also going to small encampments along the highway asking people what their needs are and handing out fliers with information to verified resources.

"A lot of times we'll try to get help to someone and they say, 'Well I've already tried that, I've called this number nobody answered, or I've done this and it doesn't work.' So, one thing I wanted to do when we hand this out, I want to make sure when somebody calls that phone number that somebody is going to be on the other end to help them out," said Oak.

Business owners like Takyi said they are hopeful crime will reduce and safety will increase with the help of the emphasis patrol. Takyi said if things don't change, he might have to change locations.

"If you are not making money to pay your bills, pay the rent and support your life, what are you going to do? Have to leave. If it keeps on slowing things down, it will collapse the business," said Takyi.

Takyi said he hopes the [emphasis patrols](#) can get the job done bringing order back to the highway.

"It will help us, it will help the people on the street because most of them are really in need," said Taki. "That would be great, it would be great for the community. So, I applaud that."

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HEADLINE	01/25 LAPD concern: guns stolen from rail cars
SOURCE	https://www.hastingstribune.com/ap/national/guns-stolen-from-rail-cars-spark-lapd-concern/article_d8a2c8f5-ae59-5caa-b21b-96d3dae43368.html
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — Guns are among the items that have been stolen from cargo containers on railroad tracks in Lincoln Heights, Los Angeles Police Chief Michel Moore said Monday.</p> <p>"People were ... breaking into these containers and stealing firearms, tens of firearms," Moore told the Police Commission. "That gave us the great concern as a source again of further violence in the city as people were capitalizing on the transport of these containers with having little or no policing or security services there."</p> <p>Moore said that on Thursday, the day Gov. Gavin Newsom showed up to help bag debris and decry the thefts, the LAPD arrested six people who had been under surveillance for crimes related to the train break-ins.</p> <p>The issue gained national attention earlier this month as images of the debris left on the Union Pacific tracks by thieves went viral. But that did not stop the stealing, Moore said.</p> <p>"Despite all the attention brought to this, and despite the ongoing efforts by Union Pacific to solve some additional security elements, we still have people that are still drawn to this location," he said.</p>

The rail line runs about 275 miles of tracks in Los Angeles County, where since December 2020 an average of 90 containers a day have been burglarized, Union Pacific said. Most of those have occurred in two rail yards, including the one in Lincoln Heights.

Robynn Tysver, a spokeswoman for the 160-year-old railroad, said Union Pacific has brought in dozens of special agents to help and “will continue to monitor and clean up the tracks.” She declined to comment on the stealing of firearms from the containers.

The thefts set off a volley of accusations last week between Union Pacific and Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón.

After the railroad company said the theft problem was made worse by Gascon’s approach to prosecuting criminal offenders, the district attorney chastised Union Pacific for having poor security.

“It is very telling that other major railroad operations in the area are not facing the same level of theft at their facilities as UP,” Gascón said in a letter Friday. “We can ensure that appropriate cases are filed and prosecuted; however, my office is not tasked with keeping your sites secure and the district attorney alone cannot solve the major issues facing your organization.”

Gascon said that since 2019, law enforcement agencies have presented 181 cases to the DA's office for prosecution, including 47 last year. In about half of the 2021 cases, his office filed felony or misdemeanor charges of burglary, theft and receiving of stolen property. The rest were declined either due to lack of evidence or because the offenses involved low-level drug possession or homelessness.

According to Moore, Union Pacific has agreed to more regular cleanings of the area, but the fact that the debris was left for so long created a “free-for-all,” he said.

He said the LAPD is working with the Department of Transportation on physical improvements to the Lincoln Heights site that would deter would-be rail burglars.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Man shot inside NYC hospital ER
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/man-shot-nyc-hospital-suspect-remains-police
GIST	<p>A manhunt is underway in New York after a gunman shot a man Tuesday inside an emergency room of a hospital in the Bronx.</p> <p>The victim was described as a 35-year-old male. He was in a line to speak with a hospital representative at Jacobi Medical Center. He was shot in the arm and the gunman fled the scene, CBS 2 of New York reported.</p> <p>"This was a cowardly act in a space where New Yorkers come for healing and care. Our health care heroes swiftly took care of the shooting victim and took actions to protect the other patients in the waiting room. Our immediate focus is on caring for the patient and ensuring the safety of our staff. We are working closely with the NYPD as they conduct their investigation," the hospital said in a statement after the shooting.</p> <p>The attack was targeted, according to the NYPD, CBS 2 reported.</p> <p>"Today's shooting is a sad reminder that we need to address the devastating problem of gun violence in our communities," Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson tweeted after the shooting.</p> <p>The entire incident was captured on hospital surveillance, showing calm in the waiting room before the victim and the gunman appear to trade glances. The gunman then rushes past bystanders, pulls a gun, and fires at least four shots, police said, according to the report.</p>

	<p>"My residents and families of the #Bronx deserve to be safe just as anyone else. It's unacceptable that children are shot in car seats with their parents and patients shot waiting in emergency rooms. This is madness! Out of control. We are in a State of Emergency," Gibson added in a subsequent tweet.</p> <p>The victim underwent successful surgery and is expected to recover, CBS 2 reported.</p> <p>"Just because you have a gun doesn't mean that you have a right to terrorize our communities. I'm telling you to stop it. This is a hospital. This is someone getting care in emergency. How dare you," City Councilwoman Marjorie Velazquez tweeted after the shooting.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/26 Wisconsin deputy shot after traffic stop
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/wisconsin-milwaukee-deputy-shot-traffic-stop-foot-pursuit
GIST	<p>A Wisconsin sheriff's deputy conducting a traffic stop early Wednesday was shot multiple times, and authorities are searching for the suspected shooter who fled from the scene on foot.</p> <p>While the deputy was conducting the traffic stop in Milwaukee, Wisc., in the area of W. Adler and S. 68th streets, a passenger in the vehicle fled on foot and the deputy who initiated the stop pursued.</p> <p>While giving chase, near 64th and Adler, the deputy suffered multiple gunshot injuries.</p> <p>As of about 3:30 a.m. local time, the deputy was conscious, breathing and receiving treatment, according to the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office, which tweeted a major incident alert.</p> <p>The driver and vehicle are in custody, but the passenger remained at large and should be considered armed and dangerous, according to the sheriff's office.</p> <p>Police departments in West Allis and Milwaukee are assisting in the search.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Lawsuit: Oregon governor's clemency push
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/oregon-kate-brown-clemency-push-violent-crime
GIST	<p>With violent crime on the rise in big cities around the country, Oregon's progressive governor is pioneering the power of executive clemency, prompting an outcry from prosecutors in her state charged with putting dangerous criminals behind bars.</p> <p>"This is the massive release of violent criminals through a process, which violates the legal requirements of law," said Kevin Mannix, the president of Common Sense for Oregon and the lawyer whose firm is bringing a lawsuit against Gov. Kate Brown on behalf of two district attorneys and the families of three murder victims.</p> <p>In Portland, Oregon's largest city, police statistics show 85 homicides in 2021, up from 57 in 2020. There were 36 in 2019 – and 26 the year before that.</p> <p>Mannix and the plaintiffs have taken issue with the nearly 1,000 convicts who Brown has allowed to leave prison early after March 2020.</p> <p>"Recidivism, or repeat conviction rate, for violent criminals is at least 40%," Mannix told Fox News Digital Tuesday. "Sure, we try to rehabilitate people. We try to change their lives, and we should keep trying. But the prediction I would make is that 40% of these violent criminals are going to commit another violent crime."</p> <p>On an individual basis, Mannix said, the governor has the right and the power to grant clemency. But there are policies on how to do so that he alleges she is flouting.</p>

"[The petitioners] seek Mandamus to order suspension of illegal sentence reductions which are being carried out under the Governor's asserted clemency power, but which violate the clemency requirements of the Oregon Constitution and Oregon laws," the filing reads.

According to Cornell Law School, a writ of mandamus is a court order for a government official to "properly fulfill their official duties or correct an abuse of discretion."

In addition to failing to properly notify victims' families, the suit alleges, the governor unlawfully delegated her clemency powers to state agencies, including the Oregon Board of Parole.

"She's turning herself into a super-legislature, which is across the board suddenly lowering sentences," Mannix said. "And we're saying she doesn't have the power to carry out that process."

The prosecutors, Lane County's Patricia Perlow and Linn County's Doug Marteeny, are also asking the judge to stifle Brown's policy on commutations for people convicted of crimes as minors.

"The commutation power does not grant the governor the ability to establish a new alternative penalty of being subject to a Parole Board hearing and oversight," Marteeny wrote in a court filing. "I believe the governor has attempted to exercise powers not granted to her in her commutation powers and has violated established laws regarding the parameters of the clemency process."

Joining them in the lawsuit are the relatives of three murder victims.

Randy Tennant's mother was stabbed to death by her own grandson, Andrew Johnson, when he was 17. He stabbed her in the neck and head 10 times, then stole \$2,000 and went on a shopping spree. He has served seven years of a 25-to-life sentence.

Samuel Williams lost his developmentally disabled daughter, Jessica, when three teens stabbed her under Portland's Steel Bridge, "mutilated" her body and lit it on fire. Richard Alsup served 16 years of a 25-to-life sentence. Amy Jones, Williams' surviving daughter, is also a plaintiff in the suit.

Melissa Grassl found her partner, Austin French, shot dead in their bedroom on Halloween of 2006. His brother, Cayche French, has served 14 years on a 25-to-life sentence.

A spokesperson for Brown last week told Fox News Digital that the governor "takes every effort" to get input from the victims of crime before granting clemency.

The governor's office did not respond to a request for comment on the lawsuit.

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HEADLINE	01/25 San Francisco: anti-Asian hate crimes rise
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/san-francisco-reports-big-increase-in-anti-asian-hate-crimes/
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The mayor of San Francisco expressed despair over the increase in reported hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders last year, up an astonishing 567% from the previous year, according to preliminary figures released by the police department on Tuesday.</p> <p>Mayor London Breed pledged continued support for the community, saying she suspects actual numbers are much higher because people are reluctant to report to the police. The initial count shows 60 victims in 2021, up from nine in 2020. Half of last year's victims were allegedly targeted by one man.</p> <p>It would have broken her heart if the grandmother who raised her had been attacked "in the way that we see so many of our seniors of the AAPI community being attacked," Breed said at Tuesday's press conference. "But that did not happen. Because as a community we protected one another. And that's what we have to do now more than ever."</p>

Hateful attacks against the AAPI community — Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders — surged nationally during the pandemic, fueled in part by then-President Donald Trump’s calling COVID-19 a derogatory nickname that insulted China. The Stop AAPI Hate coalition out of San Francisco State University tracked more than 10,000 incidents of hate from March 2020 through September 2021.

In San Francisco and elsewhere, video clips of Asian Americans being attacked and robbed on public streets alarmed the community so much that frightened seniors stayed home. Most recently, former San Francisco Bay Area resident Michelle Go died in New York City after a mentally disturbed man pushed her in front of a subway. Officials there say there is no indication the man was motivated by racial bias, but Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are still rattled.

San Francisco Police Chief Bill Scott said at Tuesday’s news conference they have expanded the crime tip line to include more languages and are sharing safety tips for Lunar New Year celebrations. But he also acknowledged his department is only part of a criminal justice system that includes prosecution and judges.

Statistics do not show the whole picture because not everyone reports incidents. Also, prosecutors are unable to tack on hate crime enhancements without a clear statement of bias by the alleged attacker. This has frustrated some victims and their families, who see the charge as a sign of accountability.

San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin, who faces a recall election in June, has come under fire from some Asian American victims.

On Tuesday, lawyers for Anh Lê filed a federal lawsuit against Boudin, saying his office has systemically refused to uphold the rights of Asian Americans victimized by racial violence. Lê says the DA’s office never informed him of a lenient plea deal cut with his attackers or the lack of a hate crime charge until after the fact.

Rachel Marshall, a spokeswoman for the DA, said in a statement that Boudin has been a “steadfast advocate” for improved services and support for the AAPI community. He has added multilingual advocates to his office and launched an AAPI elder abuse steering committee, she said.

The mayor at Tuesday’s news conference declined to comment on the lawsuit.

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HEADLINE	01/25 Man shot, killed in Tacoma parking lot
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/man-shot-killed-in-tacoma-parking-lot
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - Tacoma police are investigating after a man was shot and killed in a parking lot on Tuesday evening.</p> <p>Officers responded to the 8700 block of S. Hosmer Street for reports of a man down in the parking lot.</p> <p>When officers arrived, they found a man unresponsive. Officers tried to save his life, but the 29-year-old victim was pronounced dead at the scene.</p> <p>His death is being investigated as a homicide.</p> <p>Police have not released any suspect information.</p> <p>It's unclear what led up to the shooting.</p> <p>The shooting comes hours after an informal "meet the chief" session with Tacoma police's new chief, Avery Moore. Moore is taking over as the city has seen a rise in several types of violent crime over the last year.</p>

HEADLINE	01/25 SPD: slew of possibly connected crimes
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattle-police-investigating-slew-of-possibly-connected-assaults-robberies-in-u-district
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle Police suspect a possible connection between a string of assaults and robberies in the University District Monday night.</p> <p>Officers received a report at 5 p.m. of four men assaulting someone near 45th Street and 15th Avenue. The caller said the men kicked and punched the person until they passed out, then left the area.</p> <p>About 45 minutes later, two women said they were walking near 45th and 18th Avenue when they were jumped by three men and a woman. They said their attackers pulled up in a Mercedes sedan in an alleyway and started punching them, while one of the men used a Taser on them.</p> <p>Some bystanders heard the commotion and entered the alleyway, and the suspects jumped back into their car and sped off.</p> <p>Around 8:15, police were called to at least two failed carjackings, then an armed robbery at 42nd Street and University Way at 11:45. The suspects reportedly forced employees into a back room, then ordered them to hand over their phones and wallets, and ran off with them.</p> <p>SPD suspects these incidents may be connected, and ask anyone with information to call the department's Robbery Unit at (206) 684-5535.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Mexico: Canadians killed over gang debts
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/25/mexico-resort-shooting-canadians-international-crime-debts
GIST	<p>The killing of two Canadians at a resort on Mexico's Caribbean coast last week was motivated by debts between international gangs apparently dedicated to drug and weapons trafficking, according to a senior Mexican prosecutor.</p> <p>"The investigations indicate that this attack was motivated by debts that arose from transnational illegal activities that the victims participated in," said Oscar Montes, the chief prosecutor of the Quintana Roo state, on Tuesday. "The information [is] that they were involved in weapons and drug trafficking, among other crimes."</p> <p>The attack took place Friday at the Hotel Xcaret resort, south of Playa del Carmen.</p> <p>Prosecutors had previously said both victims had criminal records in Canada, and one was a known felon with a long record related to robbery, drug and weapons offenses.</p> <p>A Canadian woman was wounded in the attack and is being treated at a local hospital.</p> <p>Montes said the attack had been planned for almost a month by a crime faction which he declined to name but said had not previously been known to operate in the area.</p> <p>The attackers apparently had guest wrist bands to enter the resort.</p> <p>Montes said a first group of assassins hired to kill the Canadians earlier in January abandoned the job because there was too much security. A second assassin flew in to the resort to carry out the killing.</p> <p>Authorities said the two suspects arrested in the case so far were a professional kidnapper from Mexico City who coordinated the plot, and the hired killer.</p>

	<p>Police also alleged that they had arrested a woman, who was apparently part of the group of 10 Canadians who were vacationing at the resort. Montes said the woman had allegedly met with the killers and may have been providing them information.</p> <p>Quintana Roo, which is visited by huge numbers of foreign tourists, has previously played host to numerous crime rings with international connections.</p> <p>A Romanian gang has long operated in the state, using ATM machines to clone credit cards or make illegal withdrawals. And this week authorities arrested two Ukrainians for their alleged involvement in a fuel theft ring. Immigrant traffickers have long used Cancún as base for smuggling Cuban migrants.</p> <p>Last week's killings were the latest in a series of brazen acts of violence along Mexico's resort-studded Mayan Riviera coast, the crown jewel of the country's tourism industry.</p> <p>In November, a shootout on the beach of Puerto Morelos left two suspected drug dealers dead. Authorities said there were about 15 gunmen from a gang that apparently disputed control of drug sales there.</p> <p>In late October, farther south in the laidback destination of Tulum, two tourists – one a California travel blogger born in India and the other German – were killed in the apparent crossfire of rival drug dealers.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 NYPD: second officer dies from shooting
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/nyregion/wilbert-mora-dead-nypd-shooting.html
GIST	<p>As a student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in 2018, the same year he joined the New York Police Department, Officer Wilbert Mora studied the effects of stop-and-frisk tactics and less confrontational strategies like community policing on neighborhoods like East Harlem, where he lived.</p> <p>His partner, Jason Rivera, had experienced aggressive policing firsthand: As a young man growing up in the Inwood area of Manhattan, he and his brother had been stopped without cause. He decided to join the force in an effort to improve the relationship between the department and communities like his.</p> <p>On Friday, as the two officers responded to a domestic disturbance call in Harlem, a gunman opened fire inside a cramped hallway, killing Officer Rivera and gravely wounding Officer Mora. On Tuesday, the police announced that Officer Mora had also died of his injuries.</p> <p>The two young officers — Mora was 27, Rivera was 22 — were emblematic of a changing police force that has struggled to repair its relationships with the city's Black and Hispanic communities. Both Latino in a department that was once overwhelmingly white, the officers were cognizant of problems with policing and eager to play a role in confronting them.</p> <p>Today, more than 30 percent of the Police Department's nearly 35,000 uniformed officers are Latino. The ranks of Latino officers have grown in recent years alongside Asian officers, while the share of Black officers has stagnated.</p> <p>Officers Rivera and Mora were part of a growing contingency of Dominican officers. On Tuesday, at a memorial outside Officer Mora's home in East Harlem, a diverse group from the 32nd Precinct, where Officers Rivera and Mora were assigned, stood reading messages left by well-wishers and wiping away tears.</p> <p>In an email to officers announcing Officer Mora's death on Tuesday, Commissioner Keechant Sewell said the department's grief is "incalculable."</p> <p>Officers Mora and Rivera, she wrote, "were dedicated, courageous and compassionate officers, loved by many."</p> <p>"The pain their families feel is immeasurable," she said.</p>

Officer Mora graduated in 2018 with a bachelor's degree from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan, where he showed a deep interest in how the police should operate in New York City's predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods.

Professor Irina Zakirova, who taught his capstone seminar, said in an emailed statement that he was "a curious and passionate" student who was excited about joining the Police Department and made class discussions richer with his input.

"He even wrote his final research paper examining the effectiveness of proactive and reactive policing in reducing crime, discussing the effects of stop and frisk, and community policing in New York City," she said. "I recall discussing his paper with him, and I found him to be very knowledgeable about the history of policing and police reforms in New York City."

Officers Mora and Rivera grew up during the height of stop and frisk, and were teenagers when a landmark federal ruling in 2013 declared the tactics violated the civil rights of mostly young Black and Hispanic men in the city, who were stopped and searched millions of times for weapons and drugs by officers with no legal justification. Since then, the number of stops has plummeted, and the city has developed new protocols under the guidance of a federal monitor.

In announcing Officer Mora's death on Tuesday, the police described his family's decision to donate his organs for transplant as a final act of service.

Leonard Achan, the president of LiveOnNY, the designated organ procurement agency for the New York metro area, said Officer Mora's family "are huge supporters of organ donation, they wanted to make sure that their son's legacy, brother's legacy as well, would be that he saved lives in his death as well as in his life."

On Twitter, Mayor Eric Adams mourned Officer Mora.

"He served his city, protected his community and gave his life for our safety," Mr. Adams wrote.

At Officer Mora's apartment complex on East 112th Street on Tuesday, two tables set up on each side of the front entrance carried bouquets of white flowers and more than nine dozen blue candles, many of them lit by other officers stationed outside.

For about 15 minutes that afternoon, the group of officers from the 32nd Precinct stood in front of the lit candles reading the notes that were left for Officer Mora. They eventually came together in a group embrace, placing their arms over one another in a circle, and held each other as they walked away.

Before Officer Mora's death was announced, officers and community members had left messages on four posters like "Stay strong, we are all praying for you, bro" and "Keep fighting! We need you, next to us!"

Linder Williams, who lives in the neighborhood, dropped off a blue candle, saying she felt compelled to express her condolences for the officer. Her stepdaughter lived in the same building as Officer Mora, Ms. Williams said, and had told her of how compassionate he and his family were.

"Everybody's so heartbroken," Ms. Williams, 68, said. "It was such a good family. I cried, I'll tell you. It's such a loss."

Ms. Williams wrote Officer Mora a brief message on one of the posters at the memorial: "Thank you for all you've done and God bless u."

The shooting on Friday was the first time two city police officers had been killed in the line of duty since 2014, when Officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu were ambushed and shot at point-blank range while they sat in their patrol car in Brooklyn.

“True heroes never die,” said Patrick J. Lynch, the president of the Patrolman’s Benevolent Association, the city’s largest police union. “Our brother Police Officer Wilbert Mora has left us, but he will live on in the heart of every New York City police officer from this day forward.”

Police officials said Officers Rivera and Mora had responded around 6:30 p.m. to a call from a woman who said her son had threatened her. When they arrived, the son, later identified by the police as Lashawn McNeil, was in a bedroom down a narrow hallway.

As Officers Rivera and Mora approached the bedroom door, Mr. McNeil, 47, emerged and began firing, officials said. Both officers were struck; Mr. McNeil was shot in the arm and the head by a third officer as he tried to leave the apartment. Mr. McNeil died on Monday of his injuries.

Officer Mora, while a student at John Jay, had interests beyond policing. He studied music and sang bass in a choir, said Gregory Sheppard, who was one of Officer Mora’s professors. He said Officer Mora was soft-spoken, thoughtful and reflective, and had impressed his teacher with his devotion to mastering the material.

He said Officer Mora’s death had taken an emotional toll on his former students who had also become police officers.

“It has had a really profound effect on all of them,” he said. “There’s a lot of sadness, frustration and anger.”

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HEADLINE	01/25 Staging Tri-Cities car crashes: fraud ring
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/23-charged-with-staging-tri-cities-car-crashes-in-nearly-1m-fraud-ring/
GIST	<p>Eleven Tri-Cities residents are accused of participating in a widespread fraud ring that amassed almost \$1 million in insurance payouts from staged car crashes.</p> <p>The scheme involved at least 14 vehicle accidents over a three-year period, with the conspirators misleading law enforcement officers, medical personnel and insurance companies, according to an 81-page indictment filed in federal court.</p> <p>The orchestrated collisions between each other’s vehicles often happened on remote roads and at night with no witnesses.</p> <p>No one was inside the “victim” vehicle during at least three of the staged accidents, hammers were used to break car windows in at least two, and weighted items were placed on the front passenger seat in one vehicle so the airbag would deploy on impact, federal prosecutors said.</p> <p>After some of the wrecks, the accused “sought emergency room and medical treatment for fictitious, fabricated and exaggerated accident symptoms and injuries,” and even hired personal injury lawyers to pursue their fraudulent claims, the indictment states.</p> <p>The collected payouts came from claims for bodily injury, loss of wages and property damage to the vehicles.</p> <p>Now, 23 people from four U.S. states and Canada are charged with the scam in U.S. District Court in Richland.</p> <p>They include four married couples, three sets of siblings and a father and son.</p> <p>Ten of the defendants live in Kennewick and one is from Eltopia, just north of Pasco.</p>

One woman — the live-in girlfriend of a key conspirator in Benton County — worked as a “case manager” at a Tri-Cities personal injury law firm, the court document states.

She was responsible for handling phone calls, emails, faxes and mail with insurance companies on behalf of the firm’s clients in connection with the claims.

Four of the defendants have yet to be located and are considered fugitives, according to a news release from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Washington.

The case was investigated by the FBI and the National Insurance Crime Bureau, and has been assigned to federal Judge Mary K. Dimke.

One defendant faces 64 felony charges.

And only one of the 23 defendants is not charged in the staged accident scheme, but for alleged actions during the ensuing FBI investigation.

The charges for the 23 defendants vary: mail fraud; wire fraud; conspiracy to commit mail fraud and wire fraud; conspiracy to commit health care fraud; tampering with a witness, attempted tampering with evidence; conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding; and making false statements within jurisdiction of executive branch.

Some of the crimes carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison if convicted.

Federal prosecutors allege the defendants on occasion transferred ownership or gifted a vehicle to a co-conspirator shortly before or even the day of the staged accident. And sometimes they lied about who was driving, prosecutors say, since the real driver left the scene before authorities arrived.

“The defendants would deliberately drive the preplanned ‘at fault’ vehicle into the preplanned ‘no fault’ vehicle at a preplanned location,” the indictment states. “A defendant would then make an emergency call to 911 falsely claiming an ‘accident’ occurred.”

In one allegedly planned crash, a 2015 Chevrolet Camaro hit a 2004 Hummer H2 at Oak Street and 27th Avenue in Kennewick.

The Hummer was purchased two months earlier for \$200. The buyer then reportedly rolled back the odometer, which likely increased the vehicle’s value.

Meanwhile, the owners of the Chevrolet still owed \$12,300 in financing to a Tri-Cities credit union at the time of the crash. The car was declared totaled.

The two drivers and their front seat passengers received insurance payouts totaling about \$88,000, the indictment states.

Two months after the crash, the salvaged Chevrolet was purchased by a Portland-area used car dealership through an internet automobile auction company. The Chevrolet’s original owner then bought back the salvaged vehicle days later for \$5,138.

On another case, one person bought a 2005 Toyota Sienna from a used car dealership in Oregon, then sold it for \$2,000.

The buyer registered the Toyota and got insurance on it.

The very next day, the buyer, seller and four others allegedly staged a crash on Court Street and Road 100 in west Pasco between the Toyota and a 2006 Infiniti FX35. The six participants received a settlement payout totaling almost \$390,000.

Nine months later, the Toyota buyer allegedly told a person, “You come and stage an accident, you will benefit at the beginning. At the end you have nothing. But you will benefit from the checks that you receive from them, the insurance. OK?”

The buyer was not aware that the person he was speaking to was secretly working with FBI agents during their investigation, according to the indictment.

The buyer also said the vehicle insurance and staged crash happened within a 24-hour time period, the indictment states.

The same month as the west Pasco crash, a woman allegedly drove her 2014 Mercedes CLA 250 Coupe into her brother’s 2007 Toyota Tundra SR5 at Johnson and Missimer roads, west of Prosser.

They received payouts totaling just over \$76,000.

The court document says the total paid out by insurance companies over the course of the scheme was just over \$962,300.

Six of the defendants tried to obstruct the investigation once they learned federal agents were on to them, federal prosecutors say.

That included fabricating a story that an FBI agent solicited a \$22,000 bribe payment to make the case go away, threatening physical force to prevent information of a possible federal crime being told to a law enforcement officer and a judge, and making false statements to investigators, prosecutors say.

The defendants from Kennewick are: Ali Abed Yaser, 51; Hussein A. Yasir, 39; Insaf A. Karawi, 52; Hasanein A. Yaser, 20; Ameer R. Mohammed, 45; Mohammed F. Al-Himrani, 33; Maria Elena Sanchez, 41; Farooq S. Yaseen, 32; Khalil Abdul-Razaq, 40; and Mohammed Naji Al-Jibory, 54. Jesus George Sanchez, 56, is of Eltopia.

Six suspects from El Cajon, Calif., are: Ahmad K. Bachay, 35; Mashael A. Bachay, 31; Mohammad Bajay, 39; Noor Tahseen Al-Maarej, 32; Amar F. Abdul-Salam, 40; and Firas S. Hadi, 41, of El Cajon, Calif.

The other defendants are Ali F. Al-Himrani, 40, and Rana J. Kaabawi, 38, both of Temecula, Calif.; Sinan Akrawi, 44, of La Mesa, Calif.; Seifeddine A. Al-Kinani, 37, of Las Vegas; Abdullah Al-Dulaimi, 30, of Detroit; and Hussain K. Bachay, 32, from Vancouver, Canada.

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HEADLINE	01/24 Shoplifters ravage Seattle Target store
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3322824/rantz-downtown-seattle-target-barely-surviving-shoplifting/
GIST	<p>The Target department store in downtown Seattle is being absolutely ravaged by shoplifters, with one staff member telling me theft happens “about every 10 minutes.” He wasn’t kidding.</p> <p>On a recent trip to the store on 2nd Avenue and Pike Street, I saw staff confront two separate shoplifters within 12 minutes of one another. It’s so bad that it’s not just the Biden administration’s supply chain crisis creating the empty shelves. And it’s so dangerous that customers can now only buy some products online as they’ll likely get mugged on the way out of the store.</p> <p>“The shelves are empty because we’re not getting shipments. We need the shipments because they keep stealing,” an employee told me.</p>

Shoplifting is out of control

Security staff now stand guard at both entrances to the building. They started this practice after experiencing a rash of shoplifting. Some guards are off-duty or retired police officers.

Homeless men and women flood the Target and steal what they can. In Seattle, they won't get arrested, booked, or charged for most theft.

Even on a Saturday morning, when the store didn't have many customers, I was told by a staffer that shoplifting happens "about every 10 minutes" at either side of the store. Guards stop what they can without escalating the situation.

At 11:44 a.m. on Saturday, a man walked off the elevator with what appeared to be household cleaners in his hands. He clearly hadn't paid since the checkout register on the top floor is at the opposite end of the store. As he walked toward an off-duty Seattle police officer working security, the suspect was stopped.

"No, no, no, give that to me. Give me the spray," the officer told the man who dropped one item.

The officer was able to collect several of the stolen items, but the suspect appeared to walk out with at least one item.

At 11:56 a.m., on the second floor, I saw a staff member mid-confrontation with a woman. The female suspect was forced to pull stolen clothes from her bag as security watched. Then, security escorted the woman out. She was shouting insults the entire time.

Barren shelves all throughout the store

No matter the section, customers are greeted with empty shelves.

There's little medicine in stock near the pharmacy. Household goods — from cleaners to spatulas, and towels to soap dishes — are nowhere to be found. Clothing is missing from full aisles, and the electronics department barely displays any product.

A staff member implied the supply chain crisis is impacting this Target since, he said, they're always awaiting shipment of products.

But he said the situation is dire because shoplifters "keep stealing." He said it with a sigh, annoyed at what was happening inside his store.

Seattle Target takes more precautions

Consequently, some electronics are kept in the back, instead of on the shelves.

But some items can no longer be sold in person. In the electronics section, a sign informs customers: "For the safety of our guests and team, we are currently not activating pre-paid mobile phones."

Another sign says customers can't pick up gaming consoles in store.

"For the safety of our guests the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X consoles are only available for purchase on Target.com and Target App via Order Pickup and Drive Up," the sign reads.

There's security near the order pick-up station.

This isn't organized crime

There's little doubt that stores across Seattle are victims of organized crime. But Target and other stores in the downtown core of Seattle are dying via death by a thousand homeless-induced cuts.

Stroll around the area, sidestepping tents, used needles, and the zombie-like homeless men and women wasting their lives away in a "progressive" city unwilling to cast any judgment (it's wrong to judge

addicts, we're told), and you'll see most retail stores need security stationed at their entrances and exits to keep homeless thieves from taking their products.

Seattle City Attorney Ann Davison ran on a platform of prosecuting these crimes. But between the sheer number of them occurring and a lack of police to even make arrests, there's only so much she can do.

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HEADLINE	01/26 Study: homicides in major cities ticked up
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/homicides-2021-increase-council-on-criminal-justice/
GIST	<p>Homicides in major American cities ticked up in 2021, with a 5% increase from 2020 and a 44% increase over 2019, according to a new analysis of crime trends released Tuesday by the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ).</p> <p>The study drew on crime data from 22 cities nationwide — including Atlanta, Detroit, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Memphis, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia — and found an additional 218 murders last year, compared to 2020. And while the overall increase in the homicide rate slowed, murder rates in St. Petersburg, Florida, (108%) and Austin (86%) skyrocketed, while Washington, D.C., (16%) also recorded a notable increase.</p> <p>Six of the 22 cities saw their murder rates drop, however, with sizeable dips in Seattle (25%) and Omaha (24%).</p> <p>Experts believe pandemic pressures and changes in policing tactics have contributed to the uptick in homicides.</p> <p>Despite the recent increase, murder rates have dropped considerably across the United States since the 1990s. The 22 cities included in the study recorded roughly half the number of murders documented 29 years ago — 15 deaths per 100,000 residents in 2021 versus 28 per 100,000 in 1993.</p> <p>a researcher behind the study noted that the reasons for the increases in recent years are not necessarily static. In 2020, homicides spiked following the police killing of George Floyd, which sparked calls for racial justice and police reform, followed by unrest in cities across the country.</p> <p>"The social unrest after the George Floyd killing in Minneapolis very likely played a role in [increased homicides], but differences across cities in 2021 suggests that local factors are now becoming more important," said Dr. Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis who authored the CCJ study.</p> <p>Rosenfeld's research suggests increased availability of both legal and illegal firearms has played a role in driving up homicide rates.</p> <p>Aggravated and gun assault rates continued to grow in 2021, with gun assaults jumping 8% last year. Researchers noted that murders are increasingly being carried out with firearms. According to Tuesday's study, more than three-quarters of reported murders in 2021 were committed with a gun.</p> <p>"In 2021, we saw a record fraction of homicides committed with a firearm," Rosenfeld said.</p> <p>"The firearms that make it into circulation in nearly all cases are legally purchased firearms," he added. "The question then becomes, how do those legally purchased firearms make their way into the hands of people who would use them in a crime?"</p> <p>There is currently no nationwide database tracking gun purchases, but data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) revealed that in 2020, nearly twice as many guns were recovered by police within a year of purchase than in 2019. More than 68,000 guns exhibiting a "time-to-crime" of less than seven months were recovered in 2020.</p>

Of the ATF's 40,656 criminal investigations in Fiscal Year 2021, a whopping 37,494 involved firearms.

The FBI keeps the most comprehensive data on violent crime. Approximately 85% of law enforcement agencies — more than 18,000 total nationwide — handed over their 2020 crime data to the FBI, last year. The bureau plans to release its 2021 Uniform Crime Report later this year.

According to the FBI, the murder rate rose nearly 30% nationwide from 2019 to 2020, the largest year-to-year spike since the federal government began tracking violent crime in the 1960s.

The FBI arrested roughly 7,500 violent offenders, including gang members, in fiscal year 2021, according to the Department of Justice. FBI agents assigned to the bureau's Violent Crime and Safe Street Task Forces — a unit that is roughly 2,500 officers strong — seized over 4,900 firearms.

Last weekend, violent crime in major cities took center stage yet again, after two New York City Police officers — Wilbert Mora, 27 and Jason Rivera, 22 — were fatally shot Friday while responding to a call from a mother in a dispute with her son.

In Houston, police corporal Charles Galloway, 47, was shot and killed early Sunday morning during a traffic stop. Hours later, a D.C. police officer was injured in the line of duty after a man pulled out a firearm and fired multiple shots at law enforcement.

And in Chicago, an 8-year-old girl was among five killed in the city's 22 reported shootings this past weekend. Another 17 people were wounded.

"The president is never going to be satisfied or complacent when officers are being gunned down or when Americans have to worry about whether they can safely ride the subway or bus or even be at work," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday when probed about the weekend shootings.

DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas last week conducted several sidebars with local leaders at the U.S. Conference of Mayors "about violent crime and the need to address it," he told reporters Thursday following his appearance.

Attorney General Merrick Garland vowed at the same conference that the Justice Department would "use every tool at our disposal to protect our communities" in "the fight against violent crime."

Not all crime rose in 2021, however. The CCJ report found that drug violations fell by 12% last year, and most property crimes saw a dip as well. Still, car thefts have continued to grow amid the pandemic, rising 14% in 2021.

Rosenfeld referred to car theft as a "keystone crime," saying that it "facilitates the commission of other crimes."

Moving forward, Rosenfeld said he is keeping an eye on inflation, which soared 7% in 2021 — the biggest increase in nearly 40 years, according to the Labor Department. His early research suggests rapid increases in inflation have coincided with "an uptick in robbery" and "stalling out of the downturn in larcenies."

"There's a good deal of research indicating that when inflation is up, crime rates tend to go up," he added. "And so what I think we need to keep our eye on as the pandemic — let's hope — continues to recede, is the impact of inflation on crime."

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HEADLINE	01/25 Western Mexico violence displaces 35,000
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/western-mexico-cartel-violence-leaves-35000-displaced-82473501

GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Activists from Mexico's violence-plagued western state of Michoacan said Tuesday that the government has to fight all drug cartels equally and return land to an estimated 35,000 people displaced by fighting.</p> <p>"In terms of safety, we are worse than ever," said Hipolito Mora, a founder and former leader of the 2013-2014 vigilante self-defense movement that kicked the Knights Templar cartel out of Michoacan.</p> <p>But the cartels are back, with the Jalisco cartel fighting the local Viagras gang for control of the state. The battle has featured heavy weaponry and the use of bomb-dropping drones. The government response has been to hold off incursions by the Jalisco cartel, while doing little to stop the other gangs.</p> <p>Mora said a group of activists met with senior government officials Tuesday and told them that "they have to fight all the cartels, not just one." They also demanded that authorities take into account the advice and opinions of Michoacan residents in framing a new strategy, he said.</p> <p>Rev. Gregorio López, a Catholic priest once known for wearing a flak vest while celebrating Mass, said drug cartels now essentially control parts of the state.</p> <p>"There are regions where the government frankly can't go, regions ... where organized crime has total control," he said.</p> <p>López said that at least 35,000 people have been forced to flee their homes and farms in recent years and that the government should return their land and reimburse their losses.</p> <p>The priest said the warring drug cartels extort money from almost all merchandise passing through Michoacan.</p> <p>"All the suppliers get charged. They have to pay protection money on the outskirts of the city. There are little plastic tables and some guy there charging," said López, who frequently transports food and supplies for displaced people.</p> <p>"I was carrying a load of ground corn, powder, and I had to pay 200 pesos (\$10) to get them to let my truck through. If not, they would burn it," he said of a recent experience.</p> <p>Michoacan's armed civilian "self defense" vigilante movement lasted from 2013 to 2014, but many vigilante forces were later infiltrated by the cartels.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/25 Federal court upholds El Chapo conviction
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/el-chapo-conviction-upheld/story?id=82463233
GIST	<p>A federal appeals court on Tuesday upheld the conviction of the Mexican drug lord known as El Chapo.</p> <p>Joaquin Guzman sought to overturn his conviction in Brooklyn federal court on ten grounds. The appellate court concluded "none of these claims has merit."</p> <p>Among Guzman's arguments, the strict conditions of his confinement before trial inhibited his rights to prepare a defense and benefit from the assistance of counsel.</p> <p>"The District Court did not err in concluding that Guzman was able to assist in his own defense and receive a fair trial, despite the conditions of his pretrial confinement," the decision from the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals said. "The conditions of Guzman's pretrial confinement, harsh as they were, do not provide a basis for disturbing his conviction."</p> <p>"While respecting the Court's ruling, we're disappointed that substantial allegations of grave jury misconduct continue to be swept under the rug and left wholly unexamined in a case of historic proportion</p>

— all, it appears, because of the defendant's matchless notoriety," said Guzman's attorney, Marc Fernich, in a statement Tuesday.

Guzman was convicted in 2019 of conducting a continuing criminal enterprise, including large-scale narcotics violations and a murder conspiracy, drug trafficking conspiracies, unlawful use of a firearm, and a money laundering conspiracy. He is currently serving a life sentence.

El Chapo was the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel. Under his leadership, the Sinaloa Cartel imported more than a million kilograms of cocaine and hundreds of kilograms of heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine into the United States. Trial evidence proved the cartel used murder, kidnapping, torture, bribery of officials, and other illegal methods to control territory throughout Mexico and to subdue opposition.

In November, Guzman's wife, Emma Coronel Aispuro, was sentenced to 36 months in federal prison for conspiring to distribute cocaine, meth, heroin and marijuana for import into the U.S; money-laundering and helping run the Mexican drug cartel in which her husband was the boss.

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